



*MADemoiselle DE MAUPIN*





THEOPHILE GAUTIER



MADEMOISELLE DE MAUPIN

COMPLETE AND UNABRIDGED

TRANSLATED FROM THE FRENCH BY

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### I

You complain, my dear friend, that my letters are so few and far between. But what else do you want me to tell you besides that I am in good health and I cherish still the same affection for you as before. These are facts you know full well; and considering my age and the fine qualities you possess, they are so natural that it looks rather ridiculous to send a tiny sheet of paper a hundred miles away simply to convey that much news! I have sought in vain anything worth recording. My life is extremely dull and uneventful; nothing ever happens to break its monotony. To-day proceeds to-morrow precisely in the same way as yesterday anticipated to-day. Without posing to be a prophet, I can safely forecast in the morning how I shall fare in the evening.

Here is my daily routine: the day naturally begins when I get up from bed. I break my fast, take some exercise, go out for a walk, come back home to dine, pay a few friendly calls or do a little reading. Then I retire to bed exactly in the same way as I did the night before. I go to sleep; but as my imagination is never refreshed by any new experience, my dreams are but dull and commonplace as my actual life. I am, however, getting more accustomed to this sort of existence now than I was six months ago. I am bored, it is true, but in a spirit of calm resignation. There is, however a certain sweetness about it, which may be compared to that secret charm we find in the warm and pallid autumn days after the extreme heat of summer.

Such a life, though I have come to accept it, is hardly to my liking. At least, it is not the life I dreamt would be mine; I feel I am not designed for such a life. Or perhaps I am

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mistaken, and in fact, I am only fit for this sort of existence. But it is difficult for me to accept this conclusion; because if it were my true destiny, I should have adapted myself to this life more readily, nor should I have suffered so grievously in so many places from its angularities.

You know how I am always attracted to strange adventures and how I simply adore whatever is unusual, and bizarre, enormous and dangerous. You know how avidly I devour novels and stories of travel. Perhaps there are very few people in this world who have a wilder and a more wayward fantasy than mine. Ah well, I don't know how to account for it, for I have never had any adventure, nor have I travelled. For me, far from having a voyage round the world, there is but a trip round the town I live in, where I touch my horizon on every side and where I come in grips with reality at my elbow. I live the life of the shell-fish of the sand-bank, of the ivy around the tree, or of the cricket on the hearth. Really, it is surprising that my feet have not yet taken root.

Usually, love is portrayed with a blinding veil over the eyes. Destiny instead should be treated so in pictures.

My servant is a stupid, dull-witted peasant. He has gone about the world as widely as the north wind. He has knocked about everywhere—he must have visited the hell; and goodness knows where else. He has seen all what I consider beautiful in my imagination. But he does not care a pin for it. He has found himself in the most odd corners of the globe and has met with the strangest adventures possible. Sometimes I induce him to talk, and the very idea is revolting when I reflect that all these good things fell to the lot of a simpleton who is totally incapable of thinking and feeling—who is no good for any other work than brushing my clothes and cleaning my boots.

Obviously I wish his life would have been mine. He, on

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his part, thinks I should be very happy ; it surprises him to find me so sad and depressed.

All this does not interest you I am afraid, my dear friend. Don't you think, it is hardly worth writing? But, as you so much want me to write to you, I must record all my thoughts and impressions. As I have very few facts or events to narrate, I should acquaint you instead with the ideas as they surge within me. There will not, perhaps, be much novelty or sequence in what I have to tell. But you must blame yourself for it. You have practically invited it.

We have been friends from the day of our childhood; we have been brought up together. For a long while we shared the same life, and we used to exchange our intimate thoughts and confidences. Therefore, I will not blush to tell you any stuff and nonsense that crosses my brain. I would not dot my 'i's and cross my 't's when I write to you, for with you I am not anxious to keep my self-respect. I shall be absolutely candid with you, even when I refer to trifling or to seamy side of life ; for you are certainly the last person from whom I shall ever conceal my real self.

Beneath the veil of my nonchalance, of which I spoke to you just now, I sometime feel within me a stirring of thought which is rather torpid than dead, and I do not always possess that sweet, and calm which produces melancholy. I sometimes relapse into my old state of mental agitation. Nothing in the world is so fatiguing as those motiveless whirlwinds and aimless impulses of the mind. On such days, although I have nothing special to do, I get up very early before sunrise. I have a sort of feeling that I am hard pressed for time. I dress myself in all hurry, without caring for my clothes, as if the house were on fire. I regret every minute wasted. Anyone, seeing me in that state, would think I was out for a tryst or in search for gold. But nothing of the kind! I myself do not even know where I am going. But go I must, for I



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fear I would lose everything if I do not move. I seem to hear somebody calling me from outside to witness my very destiny passing along the road at that particular moment. Methinks the question of my life is about to be decided at that hour.

I go out with an air of surprise and bewilderment. My clothes are disorderly and my hair dishevelled. People turn back and laugh at me, taking me for a youthful rake who had a night out at a tavern or somewhere. I am, in fact, intoxicated, though I have not touched any drink. My unsteady movements sometimes fast, sometimes slow, betray the symptoms of drunkenness. I wander about in the street like a dog that has lost its master, anxiously peeping at every corner. Alert and wide-awake, I turn round at the slightest noise. I glide along into a crowd heedless of the rebuffs from those I jostle and peer into everything with a clearness of vision which I do not usually possess. Then it suddenly dawns on me that I have lost my way, and that I must go further ahead, perhaps to the other end of the town. Then resume my march as if the Devil himself were goading me from behind. I run so fast that I seem to touch the ground with the tips of my toes, and I do not weigh an ounce. I must indeed look strange with my wild and funny expressions, and with my waving arms, while muttering incoherently. When I think of it in my cooler moments, I cannot help laughing at myself. But that does not prevent me from repeating it on the next occasion. If I were asked the reason for my strange movements, I should certainly be at a loss for an answer. There is no need for me to rush for my destination, as I have none. I need not fear being late since I have no appointment to keep. Nobody is waiting for me nor have I any reason to hurry.

Is it a love-affair, or an adventure, a woman or an idea, or a fortune or some lacuna in my life, after which I seek unknowingly, impelled by an obscure instinct? Or is it a

quest of my own life to reach its fulfilment? Or is it an urge to renounce my present personality and environments, Or is it an extreme boredom with my own humdrum life and a strong desire for change? There is something of all this in it, or possibly all of it together. Yet such a state of mind is always very unpleasant, with a spasm of febrile excitement followed usually by a dull languor and apathy.

I often have the impression that if I started an hour earlier or walked more quickly, I should have arrived in time; or that while I was taking the route, the person I sought was going along in another, and that a congestion of traffic on the road has spoiled all my efforts. You cannot imagine how deeply sorrow and despair overpower me when I see all this end in failure, and when I see that my youth is wasted, without any perspective opening up before me. Then all my futile passions chafe sullenly in my heart, and having nothing to nourish on, they devour each other like the wild beasts in a menagerie when their keeper forgets to feed them. In spite of the daily suppression of disappointments there still persists something in me which resists and refuses to die. I have no hope, for hope presupposes a desire as well as a certain propensity to wish events to shape themselves in some definite way as opposed to another. I do not desire anything, for I long for everything. I do not hope, or rather I have ceased to hope. And I am perfectly indifferent whether things exist or not. I am waiting for what I do not know. But still I do wait for something. Mine is an agitated state of impatient expectancy, interrupted by sudden starts and nervous movements, like the condition of a lover waiting for his mistress. But nothing happens. I come back home in a rage or I weep in anguish. I wait for the heavens to open before my eyes, that an angel may descend and reveal to me that revolution is set on foot to dower me with a throne, that a Raphaël's virgin is stepping into life out of her canvas and

is coming to kiss me, or that some relative—who, does not exist—has died and left me a legacy sufficient to float my fancies on a river of gold, or that a griffin has seized me and borne me away to an unexplored clime. But what I expect is certainly neither ordinary nor mediocre.

I have been so much saturated with that feeling that when I return home, I enquire invariably—"Was there any visitor? Is there any letter for me? Is there any new development?" I know perfectly well there is nothing nor there can be anything at all. All the same, I am always taken by surprise, and I get thoroughly disappointed, at the usual reply: "No, Monsieur, nothing whatsoever."

Sometimes, though on rare occasions, the idea becomes more definite. It may be some beautiful woman, whom I do not know and who does not know me, we may have met at the theatre or in the church, where she may not have taken any notice of me. Still I run about the whole house, and till I have rummaged the last room—I can hardly dare to tell you all this, so crazy does it all seem—I hope that she may have come and have been waiting there. It is not my conceit which leads me to do so. I lack so much in self-consciousness that I hear from others that several women are favourably and kindly disposed towards me—those very women who, I thought, have been quite indifferent to me, and have never been particularly impressed by me.

At those moments when I do not sink under the weight of ennui and despondency, my sole awakens and regains its former vigour. Again I hope, I love and I desire; and my desires became so violent that I think they must attract, like a powerful magnet, any object, however distant. That is why I wait for the things I desire so intensely, instead of going out to seek them; and I am often disposed to ignore the opportunities that appear to favour my hopes. Any other man would like to address a letter of love to the goddess of his

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heart, or to seek for an opportunity to approach her. I, on my part, ask of the messenger an answer to a letter which I have never written, and all the time I like to engage my brain in creating the most fanciful situations, in which I can present myself in the most peculiar and favourable light to my beloved. The plans I devise to introduce myself to her and to declare my passion would make a larger and more interesting book than the strategy of Polybias. It would, however, often suffice for me to request one of my friends to present me to that woman, and then to clinch the introduction with a mythical compliment punctuated with glances.

Hearing all this, you may think I should be certified as a lunatic. But I am still a young man of fairly sound reason; and I have not tried to put into practice my crazy idea. All this is brewing in the deep recesses of my mind, and these absurd fancies are kept carefully concealed within myself. Nothing can be discerned from outside, and I enjoy the reputation of being a quiet and sober young man, insensible to feminine charms, and indifferent to the pleasures of my age.

This notion is far from the truth, as most of the judgments of mankind are.

But, in spite of many rebuffs, some desires of mine have been realized. Judging from the limited amount of pleasure I felt in their fulfilment, I am afraid of the outcome of the further realization. You remember my childish ardour in desiring to possess a horse of my own. Just lately my mother presented one to me. He is black like ebony, with a little white star on his forehead. It has a glossy mane, and fine limbs, just as I desired. When it was first brought to me, I was so much thrilled to see it, I remained pale for a quarter of an hour. I only came to myself with difficulty. Then I mounted, and without a word, galloped fast for an hour through the fields, in such a state of rapture as you could hardly imagine. I did it again everyday for more than a

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week, and I still wonder how the animal did not break down. But my enthusiasm died down slowly. Then I trotted my horse, and walked him. Now I ride it so indifferently that I fail to notice, when it happens to stop. The pleasure has lapsed into a habit more quickly than I could have believed possible. As for Farragus, for such is the name I gave it, it is the most charming animal that could be found. Its locks are soft as the down of an eagle. It is fleet as a stag, and gentle as a lamb. You will greatly enjoy a gallop on it when you come here. Though my passion for riding has waned, I am still very fond of it, as it is an animal of very fine disposition and I infinitely prefer it to most people. If only you could know how joyfully it neighs when I go to see it in the stable! and with what intelligent eyes it looks at me. I confess I am so deeply touched by all these marks of affection that I put my arms round its neck and kiss it as tenderly as if it were a pretty girl. I also had another desire, keener, more ardent, constantly awake, and more dearly cherished. Upon this desire, I had built in my heart a delightful castle of cards, and a palace of chimera—a castle, often destroyed but always rebuilt with despairing persistence. It was a desire to possess a mistress—a mistress all to myself like my horse. I do not know whether my ardour would have cooled down as it did in the case of the horse. Due to my fanciful nature, I desire with a frantic ardour what I wish to obtain, without taking any initiative to get it. If by any chance, I do attain my object, I undergo so acute a moral languor, and feel so much harassed that I suffer very much from exhaustion, and I have no longer the stamina to enjoy it. So, things which come to me without any ardent desire on my part for them, usually afford me more pleasure than those I have most passionately desired.

I am twenty-two! I am not innocent. Alas! Now-a-days nobody at that age is undefiled either in body or in mind, and

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this is worse. Besides, those professional daughters of joy who count no more than an evil dream, I have made love, occasionally in out of the way places, to a few honest or semi-virtuous women—who are neither pretty nor ugly, neither young nor old, such as are conveniently encountered by easy-going young men whose hearts are free and unattached. Endowed with a little goodwill and many romantic illusions, one is disposed to call them mistresses if he likes, I, for my part, find it impossible to do so, for I might have a thousand such affairs, and I should still deem my desire ungratified as ever.

I have not yet had any mistress and I earnestly yearn to possess one. It is an idea which peculiarly worries me. It is not the exuberance of temperament, and of the heat of youthful passion, nor is it the first blossoming of my adolescence. It is not the woman I desire; I want a mistress, and I will have one.

If I do not succeed, I must admit, I will not recover from the shock of failure, and it will fill me with a sense of frustration that will seriously influence the rest of my life. I should regard myself a failure in one direction—an incomplete person deformed in mind and heart; for my demand is just, and nature owes it to every man. If I fail to gain my object, I should look down on myself as a child, and I should lack the necessary self-confidence. To me a mistress means as much as a robe of manhood to a young Roman.

When I see so many men, worthless in every respect, wedded to beautiful women, the latchet of whose shoes they are unworthy to unloose, I cannot help blushing for them—and also for myself. I begin to form a contemptible opinion of women, when I see them infatuated with cads who despise and betray them, rather than reciprocating their love with a loyal and sincere youngman who would adore them and would consider himself very fortunate—as I, for instance,

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would. It is quite true that the men of the former type lounge about in every saloon, strut forward or loll over the back of an arm-chair, while I remain confined in my own room with my forehead against the window-pane, watching the mist rise from the river, while I silently build in my heart the perfumed sanctuary and the marvellous temple to lodge the future idol of my soul. It is a chaste and poetic occupation for which women, however, show the least liking.

Women in general care very little for the men of contemplative disposition. They have a peculiar preference for men of action. After all, they are not very wrong. Obligated by their education and social position to wait in silence, they naturally prefer men who come forward and address them, thus saving them from a false awkward position. I know all this; but I for the life of me, could not find my way to get up from my seat as many men do, and walking through the lounge approach a woman, and tell her—"Your dress is simply angelic," or "Your eyes are peculiarly bright to-night."

But nonetheless I must have a mistress. I do not know who she will be; but I fail to find any, among the women I know, who could properly fill that dignified position. In them I perceive very few of the qualities, I deem necessary. The young ones either lack in beauty or in accomplishment. Those who are young and beautiful have mean and repulsive vices. And then there is always a brother, or a husband or an aunt going about with sharp eyes and long ears, who has to be coaxed or just thrown out of the window. Every rose has its thorns, every woman a host of relatives who must be carefully removed, if a man aspires to pluck the fruit of her beauty. Even the distant country cousins, who nobody has ever seen, are ready to preserve, in all its whiteness, the immaculate purity of their dear relative. All this is nauseating, and I will never have the patience necessary for rooting out

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all the weeds and cutting off all the briars which so fatally obstruct the approaches to a pretty woman.

I do not like mothers, and still less do I like the young daughters. I must also confess that married women have not much attraction for me. There is something revolting to me in a love affair with a married woman, for I cannot bear the idea of sharing. The woman who has a husband and a lover plays the courtesan to either of them, and often to both. And moreover, I could never agree to yield my place to another. My pride would never lower itself to such a humiliation, I would by no means, retire in favour of another man. Even were the woman to be compromised and lost, and the two of us to fight it out with knives, each with a foot on her body, I would not flinch. Secret stairs, wardrobes, closets, and all the devices of adultery would appear but a poor expedient to me.

I am very little interested in what is styled as virginal innocence of youth, purity of heart and other charming things which sound so very enchanting in poetry. I simply call that nonsense, ignorance, imbecility or hypocrisy. That virginal purity means sitting on the edge of a couch with the arms pressed against the body, with the eye fixed in the point of the corset, and opening the lips only when the grandparents permit; this innocence which has the monopoly of straight hair and white dresses; which wears high corsages, because the beauty of the neck and shoulder is not developed—all this I do not relish very much.

I do not care at all to teach the alphabet of love to these little simpletons. I am neither old enough nor sufficiently corrupted to find any pleasure in this. Besides, I could not acquit myself well, for I have never been able to instruct anybody, even in a subject with which I am thoroughly conversant. I prefer women who can read fast, for with them one can more quickly reach the end of the chapter. In all



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things, more specially in love, it is the end which should engage our utmost consideration. In this respect I follow the method of those who read a book backwards, starting from the end of the chapter, and then go back to the beginning. Such a method has its peculiar charm in reading and in love-making as well. The reader, when assured of the conclusions of the story, relishes the details all the more. By reversing the order, he meets with many surprises.

Hence, young girls, and married women are both excluded from the category. There remain only the widows to whom our selection is limited. Alas! I am very much afraid even among them I shall not find what I desire.

If I were to court one of these pale narcissi soaked in a warm dew of rosy tear, leaving with melancholy grace over the recent grave of a husband who is lying comfortably there, I should most certainly be, within a very short time, as unhappy as the deceased husband was in his life-time. Widows, however young and bewitching, have one very serious defect. If a small cloud darkens the sky of their love, they are apt to remark at once with an air of contempt: "Ah, to-day you behave exactly as my husband used to do! He said just the same thing in his quarrels with me. How strange that you speak in the identical tone and you have the same look in your eyes. You would hardly believe how exactly you resemble my husband when you lose your temper. There is such a strange similarity!" How agreeable to have such stuff thrown at your face!

There are some impudent ones who go so far as to sing the praise of the deceased in the style of an epitaph, extolling the qualities of his mind and body at the expense of your own. At least with the wives who have only one or several lovers, a husband enjoys the inestimable privilege of never hearing a word about his predecessor, and this is no trifling consideration. Women are too much endowed with a sense of

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propriety to make any reference to their past affairs which are consigned to oblivion as soon as possible. One is always given to understand that he is the first lover the woman ever had.

I do not know of any reasonable argument in opposition to such a well grounded aversion. I do not mean to say that the widows cannot be very attractive when they are young and beautiful. They have sweetly languishing looks. They have charming ways of letting their arms droop, bending their necks, and rousing themselves uneasily like a dove widowed of its mate. Many a charming pose is softly concealed under the transparent weeds—the conquettish expression of despair, sighs cleverly heaved, and tears which fall so reasonably and leave the eyes so alluringly bright! Really, only after wine, if not before, the liquor I like best is a beautiful and limpid tear-drop, trembling on the tip of a blonde or dark eye-lash, who can resist it? None! Black suits women so well! A white skin, poetry in itself, turns to ivory, snow, milk and alabaster, and anything candid for the use of madrigal composers; the only point in favour of tan is that it has vivacity and dash.

The woman is really lucky when she is in mourning. The reason why I shall never marry is the fear that after my death she will have the pleasure of wearing mourning dress. There are, however, some women who do not know how to make the best of their grief. They weep in such a fashion that they get red noses and distorted features like the gargoyles of some fountains. A woman should have much charm and art to shed tears in an agreeable way; without these qualities, she runs the risk of remaining unconsolated for long. But however ardent may be my pleasure of weaning away some Artemisia from the shades of her Mausolus, I will not pick out from among this crowd of women in bereavement any one to ask for her hand in exchange of mine.

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I can hear you ask : "Whom on earth will you then have? You do not care for young maidens, married women nor widows. I do presume you do not prefer grandmothers. Then whom do you really love?" This is my riddle, and if I could solve it, I would not have worried you. Uptil now I have never loved a woman, but I have loved and do still love "Love". Although I have had no mistress, and the woman with whom I had affairs have only excited desire in me, I have felt and I can experience real love. I did not love any particular woman; but I love some one on whom I have never set my eyes, but who must be existing somewhere, and I shall find her, God willing. I know very well what she is like, and I will recognize her when I meet such a person. I have often pictured to myself the place where she dwells, the costume she wears, the colour of her eyes and hair. I can hear her voice. I shall recognize her even in a large crowd; if her name is called out, I shall certainly turn. It is impossible for her not to have one of the five or six names I have given her in my imagination.

Her age should be twenty-six, neither more nor less.

She will not be innocent, but not blase'. That is the ideal age for making love, without any tinge of puerility or lewdness. She will be of normal height; I have an aversion to giants or drawfs. I should be able to carry her in my arms from the sofa to the bed. When she stands on her tip-toe, her mouth must be within easy reach of my kiss. She must have a fine figure, rather plump than thin. I am like a Turk in my taste, and it would annoy me to stumble on a bone where I expect a curve. She should have a body, soft and fleshy, hard and firm like an unripe peach. That is exactly how my ideal mistress should look. She should be fair as a blonde with black eyes, and dark as a brunette with a sparkling, red-tinted smile. Her lower lip will be full, her bosom and throat small and round, her wrists fine, her hands

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plump and tapering, her gait undulating like a serpent poised on its tail, her hips strong and swaying, her shoulders broad, and the nape of her neck adorned with down. She should be a type of beauty, fine and firm, elegant and vivacious, real and romantic—a complete Rubens picture.

I would not like her to wear a ring or a bracelet. Her dress must be of velvet or brocade; I could hardly tolerate her dressed in satin. I prefer to finger a silk skirt rather than a linen. I would welcome pearls or plumes dropping down from her head—and not natural flowers nor a simple ribbon. I know the curves of a linen skirt are as much appetizing as silken ones, still I prefer silk. In dreams I have chosen my mistress from the galaxy of queens, empresses, princesses, sultanas and celebrated courtesans; but never have I dreamt about bourgeois dames or shepherdesses. I have never in course of my wildest fancies imagined myself in dalliance on a green bed of grass or a tattered mattress.

Beauty, in my opinion, is a diamond to be mounted and encased in gold. I cannot conceive of a real beauty unaccompanied by a carriage or a retinue of lackeys and all the paraphernalia of wealth. There should be a harmonious blending of wealth and beauty. One complements the other. A pretty foot suggests a beautiful shoe, and that, in its turn, calls for a handsome carpet, a carriage and all that follows. A pretty woman in poor dress amidst miserable surroundings is to me the most painful sight, and I could not for the life of me, fall in love with her. It is the privilege of the rich and the beautiful to indulge in grand amours without being ridiculous or humiliating. Viewed in this light, very few people could claim the right to be lovers. I will be the last person to belong to this charmed circle. Still I will not modify my dictum.

Our first meeting should be after the day's decline, at the time of a magnificent sunset. The sky would then assume

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a mantle of those orange-yellow and pale green tints that may be seen sometimes in picture of the great masters of the past. There will be a broad, fine avenue of chestnut trees in bloom, and of ancient elms peopled with doves, beautiful dark, green trees, casting moist shadows of mystery. A few sprinkling of statues; marble vases effulging their snowy whiteness from a verdant background; a lovely pond where swans disport themselves; and afar, a stone-and-brick mansion of Henry IV period, with pointed slate roofs, lofty chimneys, a weather-cock on every gable, and long, narrow windows—will complete the scene. At one of those windows would be leaning dreamily on the balcony, the queen of my soul dressed in an attire of which I said before. Behind her will stand a negro page-boy holding her fan and parrot. You see nothing is missed in the picture, and it is all so absurd. The belle would drop her glove which I will readily pick up, and then I will kiss it and restore it to her. A conversation will ensue, and I shall display all my wit which I have never possessed. I shall couch my speech in charming phrases, and shall receive appropriate response. Our conversation will be a luminous play of dazzling repartees. In a word, I shall be marvellous and be adored.

As the time for dinner approaches, I shall be invited to the repast. I shall accept with joy. What a winner, my old friend, and what a menu my imagination would picture: Wine will sparkle joyously in the crystal glass; a white and gold pheasant will shine on a crested plate. The entertainment will linger far into the night, and you may well imagine it could not be myself who would bring it to an end. Don't you think it is a very fine product of my imagination? Nothing could be more simple, and it is really very surprising that it did not happen to me ten times rather than once?

Sometimes the scene could be pictured in a great forest. The hunt is on the move; the horn is sounded, and the hounds

respond and cross the road with lightning speed. The beautiful huntress is mounted on a milk white Turkish horse, fast and frisky. Though she is an excellent rider, the animal rears and prances; and she is hard put to test in controlling it. He takes the bit between his teeth, and gallops right towards a precipice. Chance drops me from nowhere on that spot at the psychological moment. I stop the horse, and carry the fainting princess in my arms. I bring her back to consciousness and escort her to her chateau. What aristocratic soul would refuse to bestow her heart on a man who has risked his life to save hers? None; and gratitude is certainly the high road which quickly leads to love. You would agree that when I indulge in romance, I never stop half way, and I behave like a mad man. That is so, and in the world there is nothing more disagreeable and unpleasant as a reasoned and calculating madness. You must also admit that my letters, far from being merely simple notes, are but bulky volumes.

In everything I love to surpass the usual standards. And that is why I am so fond of you. Do not laugh too loudly over all the nonsense I have just scribbled. I am leaving aside my pen for launching into action, as I return to the burden of my song: I must have a mistress. I am not sure whether she will be the lady in the park or the beauty on the balcony; but I bid you good-bye now, to resume my quest. My mind has been made up. Wherever she may hide herself—in the depths of Cathay or Samarkhand—I shall seek her out. I will let you know whether I fail or succeed in my enterprise. I hope to succeed. Do wish me the best of luck, my dear friend. I am putting on my finest dress, and go out fully determined on my mission not to return without my ideal mistress.

Dreamt I have enough! now for action!

P.S. Let me have news of little D—; what is the matter with him? No one here knows anything of him. Give my compliments to your worthy brother and all your family.

## II

WELL, my friend, I am home. I did not travel to Cathay, Cashmere or Samarkhand. But I must admit I am still without a mistress. I pledged myself to a solemn oath that I would journey to the ends of the earth, but still I have only scoured the outskirts of my town.

I could not tell you why it was so. I have never been able to keep my word to anyone, even to myself. Surely the devil has much to do with it. When I say "I will go there to-morrow", you can take it for certain that I will not stir out of home. If I have decided to visit a cabaret, I go to church instead. If I wish to go to church, the road I tread appears confused like a tangled skein of thread, and I arrive at a totally different destination. I generally fast when I am bent on an orgy, and so forth. Therefore, I believe I will never have a mistress, because, I am so much determined on finding one.

I must tell you the whole story of my expedition in every detail, for it is well worth narrating. That day I spent two long hours over my toilette. I think, with my hair combed and curled, my moustache well plied with cosmetic, and with my face flushed with excitement, I did not look at all bad. Then I indulged in a critical self-examination before the mirror from different angles to assure myself that I had the real airs of an attractive gallant. At last I resolutely sallied forth looking straight ahead in a triumphant mood. I kept my forehead high in the air, lifted up my chin, and placed a hand on my hip: and I clicked my heels, as I brushed aside the passers-by.

I was like a second Jason setting forth to conquer the Golden Fleece. But alas! Jason had a better luck. Besides the Fleece, he won a beautiful princess, while I did neither.

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Then I walked along the streets, staring at women; I closely scrutinized those who seemed worth that trouble. Some assumed exceedingly virtuous airs, and passed by, ignoring me completely. Others looked surprised at first, and then smiled if they had a fine set of teeth. Others turned back to look at me when they thought I was no longer watching them, and blushed like cherries as our eyes met. The weather was fine, which drew out a big crowd on the promenade. But I must confess, in spite of all the respect I have for that half of humanity styled as "Fair Sex", that most of them are hideously ugly. Hardly one in a hundred is passable. Some one has grown moustaches, another has a blue nose, the other has red patches instead of eyelashes. One has a good figure, but a face disfigured with blotches. Another has a charming head, but she could have scratched her ears with her shoulders. Another would have put Praxiteles in the shade by the round firmness of her contours, but she seems to be skating on her feet like Turkish stirrups. Another has lovely shoulders, but her hands look like those enormous scarlet gloves which grace certain haberdashery shops. And usually what a sickening languor is visible on their faces! How they look withered, emaciated, faded, and worn out abominably by paltry passions and petty vices! And what expressions, too, of malice, devilish curiosity, greed and shameless coquetry, are to be read on their faces! Indeed a woman without beauty looks more ugly than a man who is not handsome.

I saw no pretty women there save a few grisettes. But unadorned with silk as they were, I was not interested.

In fact, I believe that mankind—in which I include women—is the ugliest creation on earth. These quadrupeds who walk on their hind legs seem singularly presumptuous when they arrogate to themselves the premier rank in creation. A lion and a tiger are more comely than a man,



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and in their species many attain to the perfect type of beauty imaginable. That occurs very rarely in the human kind. How many weaklings there are to one Antinous; how many Gothons to each Phyllis!

I am very much afraid, dear friend, I shall never realize my ideal, even though there is nothing extravagant or unnatural about it. Mine is not the ideal of a third form school boy. I do not demand any ivory gloves, alabaster columns or an azure system. I did not put into its composition any lily flower, snow, rose, jet, ebony, coral, ambrosia, pearls or diamonds. I have left the stars undisturbed in the firmament, and have not unhinged the sun out of its system. Mine is an ideal, almost bourgeois in its simplicity. And it seems that with a handful of piastres, I would procure it in any bazar of Constantinople or Smyrna. It would probably cost me less than a horse or a pedigree-dog. And the very thought that I cannot get it, for that is what I feel, is extremely annoying. And I return home, raving indignantly against my destiny.

You, free as you are from my peculiar malady, are happy, for you have accepted your life and you take things as they come. You have let yourself drift along without caring to fashion your own life. You have not sought happiness, and it has itself come to you. You are loved and you love.

Do not think that I envy you. But I become sadder than I ought to be when I think of your happiness. And I tell myself with a sigh that I am entitled to similar felicity.

Perhaps my happiness has passed me by and blind as I am, I have missed it. Perhaps it announced its coming, but the tempest raging in my soul has drowned the voice.

Perchance I have been loved silently by a humble soul, whom I failed to understand and I have disappointed. Perhaps I have myself been idealized by some one, some soul in agony, to whom I appeared as a pole-star, the dream of night

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and thought of day. Had I cared to look downwards to my feet, I could have probably found there a beautiful Magdalene, with an urn of perfume and with her drooping hair moist with tears. I went about with my arms lifted towards heaven, aspiring to grasp at the gleaming stars that eluded me, scorning all the while to pick up the little daisy that opened out its golden heart to me in the dewy grass. I have erred grievously in demanding from love something which it could not possibly give. I forgot that love is naked, unclothed, and I missed the real meaning of this superb symbol. I asked for brocades, plumes, diamonds, a sublime intelligence, knowledge, beauty, poetry, youth, supreme power—everything quite apart from love. Love can only offer itself, and whoever wants more from it proves unworthy of it.

No doubt I am too hasty: my hour has not yet struck. God who has given me life would not take it away before I have lived. Why give the poet a lyre without strings, or the man a life without love? God cannot be so inconsistent, and without doubt, at the proper moment, He will place in my way the woman whom I am to love and who is to love me. But why did love come to me before I have been gifted with a lover. Why have I felt thirsty when there is no fountain on the wayside? Why can I not fly, like birds of the desert, to lands where I could drink my fill? The world is for me a Sahara bereft of streams and date-palms. There is in my life not a single shady nook which can afford me shelter from the sun. I suffer all the ardours of a passion without tasting its ecstasies and ineffable delights. I have known its torments, but never its joys. I am jealous of chimeras. I am terrified by the shadow of a shadow. I heave sighs without any rhyme and reason. I am troubled by insomnia which no pleasant dream condescends to assuage. I shed tears which flow down to the earth unwiped. I blow out kisses to the wind which it never requites. I strain my eyes to discern in the

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far beyond a hazy and deceptive apparition. I wait for what is never to come, and with bated breath, count the hours as though I had a tryst.

Whoever you may be, angel or demon, maiden or courtesan, shepherdess or princess, whether you hail from north or south, you whom I know not, but I love, Oh, do not keep me waiting any longer; or the flame may burn the altar, and you would find my heart turned into cold cinders. Come down from the sphere where you live! Leave the crystal heaven, you, consoling spirit, and cast over my soul the shadow of your great wings. You, the woman whom I am to love, come and let me enclose you in my arms which have so long remained open for you. Golden gates of her palace! Open out; O, humble latch of her cottage! Unlock yourself! O, boughs of the woodland and brambles on the pathway! Disentangle yourselves. O, Charms and spells of the magician! Dissolve yourselves in air. O, surging crowds! Disperse and make way for her. Should you come too late, my ideal! I could no longer possess the capacity to love you. My soul is like a crowded nest of doves. At all hours of the day some desire takes wing and flies out. Doves return to their nest, and my desires never come back to my heart. The blue sky looks white under the flight of numberless doves. They travel through space, from world to world, from sky to sky, searching for a love to roost for the night. Hasten your footsteps, O my dream! or else you might find in the deserted nest only the dried-up egg-shells of the birds that have flown away.

My friend, companion of my childhood, you are the only person to whom I can tell all this. Do let me know that you sympathize with me, and do not treat me as a hypochondriac. Give me solace, for I need it more than ever. How much to be envied are those who have passions that can be gratified! The drunkard with his pleasure in the bottle meets no cruel

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opposition. From the public-house he descends into the gutter and is as happy on the garbage-heap as a king on his throne. The voluptuary frequents the company of courtesans to seek easy amours or shameless niceties of love. A painted cheek, short skirts, naked breasts, and lewd talk—and he is happy. His eyes brighten up, his lips quiver; and he reaches the climax of happiness, the ecstasy of his gross pleasure. The gambler only needs a green carpet, and a greasy, worn-out pack of cards to procure the poignant anguish, the nervous spasms and the diabolic enjoyment of his horrible passion. Those people can satiate their appetites or divert themselves. To me it is simply impossible.

That idea has possessed me so intensely that I have ceased to take any interest in arts; and poetry has no longer any charms for me. My former pleasures leave me cold. I begin to think that I am wrong, that I am asking of nature and society what they cannot give. The object of my pursuit does not exist, and I must not complain if I cannot find it. But, if the woman of whom we dream is not a living person, why is it that we love one ideal woman and not others, as we are men and our instincts should lead us inexorably to love them all? Who has given us the idea of that imaginary woman? Of what clay have we moulded that invisible statue? From where did we get the plume that we have transfixed on the back of that chimera? What mystic bird has laid in an unplumbed depth of my soul the unperceived egg from which our dream has taken shape? What is that abstract beauty that we feel, but cannot define? Why in the presence of a really beautiful woman do we sometimes say that she is good-looking, while we think her very ugly? Where, then, is the model, the type and the pattern which serves as a criterion for our judgment? For beauty is not an abstract idea; and it can only be appreciated by contrast. Have we seen it in the

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heavens, or in a star, at a ball or under the wings of a mother, a fresh bud of a stripped rose?

In Italy or in Spain? Here or there, yesterday or long ago? Is she the adored courtesan, the fashionable singer or the daughter of a king? A noble and proud head giving way under a diadem weighted with pearls and rubies? A young and childish face bent down between the nasturtiums and the volubilis of the window? To which school did belong the picture where this beauty stood out, white and radiant amid black shadows? Is it Raphael who sketched the outlines of the face that pleases us? Is it Cleamens who has polished the marble that we adore? Are you enamoured of a Madonna or a Diana? Is your ideal an angel, a sylph or a woman? Alas! the ideal is a little of them all, and yet not that. That limpid tone, that charming freshness full of splendour, that flesh in which flows so much blood and so much life, those blonde, lovely hairs which unroll themselves like golden mantles, that sparkling laughter, those bewitching dimples, those forms undulating like flames, that strength, that suppleness, those satin-like highlights, those plump arms, those fleshy and glossy shoulders—all that exuberant health belongs to Rubens. Raphael alone has known how to fill with pale amber so chaste a lineament. Who else has carved those long, black eyelashes, and drawn the fringe of those eyelids so modestly lowered? Do you believe that Allegri has played no part in your ideal? It is from him that the lady of your thoughts has stolen the dull and warm whiteness enrapturing you. She stopped a long time before his canvas to catch the secret of this angelic smile ever in bloom; she has modelled the oval of her face from the oval of a nymph or of a saint. That hip-line which meander so voluptuously is from Antipia asleep. Those plump and fine hands may be claimed either by Danae or Magdalene. The dusty antiquity itself has supplied many of the materials in the composition of your

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young chimera: That supple and strong loins which you entwined in your arms were carved out by Praxiteles. That divinity has just allowed the point of her charming foot to thrust out of Herculaneum's ashes so that your idol may not be lame.

Nature has also contributed its share. You have seen through the prism of desire, here and there, a bright eye under a persienne, an ivory forehead against a window pane, a mouth smiling behind a fan. You have guessed the shape of an arm from that of a hand, that of a knee from an ankle, what you had seen was perfect and you imagined the rest to be perfect and you finished the whole from beauties seen elsewhere. The ideal beauty as realized by painters did not even suffice for you, and you asked the poets for some still more rounded outlines, more ethereal forms, more divine graces, more exquisite refinements; you asked them to give breath and speech to your phantom, all their love, deaminess, joy and sadness, their melancholy and morbidity, all their recollections and hopes, their knowledge, their passion, their spirit and their heart. You have taken from them all that, and have added to it, to make it still more impossible, your own passion, your own spirit, dream and thought. The star has lent you its ray, the flower its perfume, the palette its colour, the poet his harmony, the marble its shape, and yourself your desire. How can a real woman, who eats and drinks, rises in the morning and lays down at night, however adorable and graceful she may be, stand a comparison with such a creature? It is not reasonable to expect it, and yet one hopes and seeks. What a singular blindness! It is sublime but absurd. How I pity and admire those who pursue through it all the reality of their dream and die content if only they have kissed their chimera on the mouth. But what frightful fate is that of the Columbuses who have not discovered their worlds, and the lovers who have not found their mistresses.

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Ah, if I were a poet, it is to those whose life is a failure, whose arrows missed their aims, who died without uttering the last word they wanted to say, and to press the hand that was destined for them, that I would consecrate my songs, and also to all who passed on unperceived to the smothered fire. the genius without outlet, the pearl remaining unknown on the ocean bed, all who have loved without being loved, all who suffered without sympathy. And it would be noble task.

How Plato was right when he banished you from his republic, and how much you harmed us, O poets. How your ambrosia has rendered our absinthe still more bitter! and how more arid and devastated we found our life after seeing the perspectives that you opened out to us on the Infinite! What terrific struggles have been brought about by your dreams against our realities. And how, during the fight, have our hearts been trodden upon and fouled by those rough athletes.

We sat, like Adam at the foot of the walls of Eden, on the steps that lead to the world that you have created and saw sparkling through the niche in the door a light brighter than the sun, while hearing confusedly some scattered notes from a seraphic harmony. Every time the door opens to let pass an elected one in the middle of a stream of splendour, we stretch our necks in an endeavour to see something. It is architecture of the fairy land which has been unparalleled save in Arabian Nights. Number of columns, arcades, spiral pillars, foliage marvellously cut out, scooped-out clovers, then porphyry, jasper, lapis-lazuli, and what not? Transparencies, dazzling reflections, profusions of strange stones, sardonyx, chrysoberyl, aquamarines, irised opals, azerodrach, crystal jets, torches that make stars look pale, a splendid vapour full of noise and giddiness, a really Assyrian luxury.

The door is closed, and nothing further is seen and your eyelids lower themselves, full of corrosive tears, on this poor

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emaciated and pale world, those shanties in ruins, on your soul, arid rock where nothing will grow, on all the miseries and misfortunes of the reality. Ah! if at least we could fly there or if the march on those steps did not scald our feet, but alas, Jacob's ladder can only be climbed up by angels.

What a fate is that of the poor at the door of the rich! What outrageous irony is a palace opposite a hut, or the ideal facing the reality or poetry facing prose! What deep-rooted hatred must be twisting and torturing the hearts of the despised people! What gnashing of teeth must be resounding at night on their pallets while the wind brings to their ears the sighs of the lutes and viols. Poets, painters, sculptors, musicians, why did you lie to us? Poets, why did you narrate to us your dreams? Painters, why have you fixed on your canvas that elusive phantom who climbed up and down between your heart and head with the bubbles of your blood and told us it was a woman? Sculptors, why have you dragged marble from the depths of Carrara to make it express eternally and to everybody's eyes, your most secret fugitive desire? Musicians, why have you listened at night to the song of the stars and flowers and noted it down? Why have you composed such beautiful songs that the sweetest voice singing "I love you" seems to us as raucous as the grinding of a saw or the cawing of a crow? Curse be upon you, you impostors. And may Heaven's fire destroy all the pictures, poems, all the statues and all librettos. But, that was a tirade of interminable length and it really departs from the epistolary style. What a jam tart!

I have allowed myself to stray into lyricism, my very dear friend! and have been ridiculously presuming for long. All this has taken me far astray from my subject which is, if I remember correctly, the glorious and triumphant tale of the Chevalier D'Albert in his pursuit—after Daraid, the most beautiful princess in the world, as they say in old time



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romances. But really it makes such a poor story that I need have recourse to digressions and reflections. I hope it will be not always so, and that before long the romance of my life will be more entangled and complicated than a Spanish imbroglio.

After erratic wandering from street to street, I made up my mind to call on a friend who was to introduce me to a saloon, where, I was told, we could meet a company of pretty women—a collection of ideal beauties in real life, enough to enthral the minds of a score of poets. There are beauties who would win the appreciation of all connoisseurs—aristocratic beauties with sea-green eyes, aquiline noses, haughty chins, regal hands and walking like goddesses with an eagle-like glance; silver lilies mounted on golden stems—humble, pale-hued violets, sweetly scented, with their eyes moist and down-cast, frail necks, and diaphanous flesh—beauties of all categories—vivacious, piquant and precious—are there. This house is verily a seraglio, without its eunuchs and agas. My friend tells me that he has had already five or six love-affairs there. This seems to be prodigious, and I am afraid, I shall have never such a success, though my friend thinks that I shall and moreover that I shall do so sooner than I could imagine. In his opinion, I have only one defect of which I will get rid in course of time. It is that I make too much of the ideal woman and not enough of individual woman in life. There may be some truth in that. He says that I will be perfectly amiable when I am free from that failing. May it be so! Women must be feeling that I despise them, for a compliment they would find charming from the mouth of another person, only tends to provoke and displease them when I make it as much as the most biting epigram. Probably the cause of it is what de C—reproached me with.

My heart was beating fast when I walked up the stairs, and I had hardly recovered myself, when de C—, after

nudging me, brought me to a woman of about thirty. She was passably good-looking, adorned with subdued luxury, with pretension of childish simplicity which did not prevent her from plastering her cheeks with rouge like carriage-wheels. She was the mistress of the house.

De C—in a mockingly whimpering voice—so different from his usual tone—which he affects in society when he wants to appear charming, told her *sotto voce* with a great show of ironical respect that scarcely concealed his profound contempt—"This is the young man of whom I spoke to you the other day. He is a man of brilliant merit. He is well-bred, and I am sure you will be glad to welcome him. That is why I took the liberty to present him to you."

"Certainly, Sir, you have done quite right," replied the lady, simpering in an extravagant fashion. Then she turned towards me, and and sizing me, like a clever connoisseur, from the corner of her eye, in a manner that made me blush to my ears, said—"You may consider yourself always a welcome guest here; please come over here whenever you have an evening to spare." I bowed rather awkwardly, and mumbled a few incoherent words which surely did not give her a good idea of my abilities. With the arrival of other visitors I was relieved from the boredom which accompanies a formal introduction. De C—drew me into a corner by the window, and began to lecture me seriously.

"You are a devil! You are going to compromise me. I introduce you as a Phoenix of spirit, a man with limitless imagination, and a lyric poet of the most transcendent and passionate order—and you stand there like a blockhead without uttering a single word. What a poor display of imagination! I thought you were more resourceful! Come, unleash your tongue; babble any amount of nonsense! You need not say anything sensible and judicious—on the contrary that would do you harm. But it is essential that you should

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talk. You should prattle a lot and carry it on longer. You should attract other's attention to yourself. Cast aside all fear and modesty. Rest assured that the people here are either fools or half-wits. Remember that a successful orator cannot afford to despise his audience too much. Now, what do you think of the hostess?"

"I have already begun to dislike her immensely. Though I spoke with her for a few minutes only, I was very much bored, as if I had been her husband."

"Ah! So, that's what you think of her."

"Yes."

"Can't you get over your dislike of her? Is it insuperable? So much the worse. It would be decent and correct of you to have been her lover for at least one month. None is more qualified than she to launch a young man into society!"

"Ah well! in that case, I should do so, since it is necessary," I replied in a piteous tone. "But do you think it is so much as that?"

"Must I also pretend to be in earnest?"

"Alas, yes, it is quite indispensable, and I will explain the reason, Madame de Themines is very much in the fashion now-a-days. She has affected all the mannerisms of the day to a superior degree, and sometimes those of to-morrow, but never of yesterday. She is extremely up-to-date. People wear what she wears; but she never wears what others have worn. Besides, she is wealthy and her equipages are in the best of taste. She has no wit, but she talks a lot of gibberish. She is a fast woman, but not passionate. She is to be pleased but not touched; for her heart is cold, and she has the head of a libertine. As for her soul—if she has any, which is doubtful, it must be very black. There is no malice and wickedness of which she is not capable. But she is particularly clever, and keeps up appearances so far as it is necessary so that nothing

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against her could be proved. Therefore she could have a love affair with any man but she would never write even the barest note. Hence, her enemies, in spite of their intimate knowledge of her ways, could find nothing to slander her, except that she paints her face with too much rouge and that certain parts of her body are not actually so well-curved as they appear to be which, by the way, is not true."

"How do you know?"

"What a funny question! How does one find out such things, except by personal observation?"

"So, you have been her lover?"

"Certainly, why not? It would have been most unseemly of me not to have been so. She has rendered me valuable services for which I am very much grateful to her."

"I cannot think how she could have been serviceable to you?"

"Are you really so dense?" replied de C—with a most comic expression, "I am afraid you are. Should I then tell you everything? Madame de Themines is supposed to be fully acquainted with special circles; and a young man whom she has taken under her tutelage for a time, can boldly push himself anywhere, and he may rest assured that he would not have to wait long for a love-affair, or may be, more than one."

"Besides this remarkable advantage, there is another equally important opportunity thrown open to him. That is, when the society women see that you are the acknowledged lover of Madame de Themines, they consider it their pleasant duty to snatch you away from such a fashionable belle, even if they have not the slightest liking for you. And instead of yourself taking the initiative in necessary preliminaries of an affair, you will be facing an embarrassing situation to pick and choose, and you will naturally become the target of feminine attention and seductive charms."

"You are not, however, actually obliged to do as I

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suggest, though it would be polite and expedient to have done so.

"But you must be quick in making your choice, and you should straightway capture the heart of the woman whom you like best and who seems to offer you the easiest access. For, by your delay, you would only miss the benefit and charm of novelty and would lose the advantage that it confers on you for a few days over all the other suitors here. All these women cannot understand those passions which are born out of intimacy and which thrive slowly and silently on mutual respect and esteem. They believe in love at first sight; they appreciate the sentiments of love when they are secretly felt and not talked about. That wonderfully helps to spare one the boredom of resistance, and all those lengthy repetitions which sentiment introduces into the romance of love and which only serve to postpone needlessly its consummation. These ladies are very anxious to save their time, which appears to them so precious that they become desperately annoyed at the useless waste of one single minute. Their keenness in obliging mankind cannot be too highly admired. They love their neighbours as themselves—another evangelic and meritorious quality of theirs. They are very benevolent creatures, who would on no account let a man die of despair.

"Three or four of them already appear to be favourably inclined towards you; and as a friend I should advise you to press home your attack at once, instead of amusing yourself by loitering here near the window and talking idly with me, for that will not take you any further."

"But, my dear C—I am quite a stranger to all this. I have not the ability to judge, at a first glance, whether a woman is impressed favourably with me. I might commit ridiculous mistakes, if you would not help me."

"Indeed! you are hopelessly primitive, and I would never have imagined one could remain so naïve and unsophisticated

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in the century in which we are privileged to live! What the devil are you doing with your pair of big black eyes which would certainly have a most devastating effect, if you could only use them properly? Look at the little woman in red who is playing with her fan at the corner near the fire-place. She has been ogling at you for the last quarter of an hour with significant intensity. She stands without a second in her special capacity of being indecent in a superior style; and she displays the impudence so majestically! She is greatly disliked by other women who have failed to reach her level of blameless indecency. But, on the other hand, she is a great favourite with men who find in her all the piquant charms of a courtesan. Her depravity has really a special charm about it, as she is clever, capricious and full of animal spirits. She serves as an excellent mistress for a young man full of many prejudices. Within a week she will purge your conscience of every scruple and corrupt your heart in such a way that you will never again be ridiculous or melancholy.

She has positive ideas on any subject, she goes to the roots of everything with astonishing rapidity and certitude. That little woman is an algebra incarnate. She is precisely what a dreamer or an enthusiast needs. She will soon correct your vapid idealism, thereby rendering you a great service. She will do it, too, with the greatest pleasure, because it is an instinct with her to disenchant poets.

My curiosity being thus roused by de C—'s description, I left the corner, and making my way between the various groups, approached the lady and scanned her attentively. She might be twenty-five or twenty-six. She was short, but well-shaped, though somewhat inclined to plumpness. She had white, fleshy arms, fine hands; and pretty, though tiny feet. Her shoulders were glossy and plump; her bosom small but what could be seen of it, was satisfying and gave a good idea of the rest. As for her hair, it was extremely shining and

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bluish-black like the wings of a jay. Her eyes were slightly slanting; her nose thin with nostrils opening out; her lips moist and sensual, with a little line on her lower lip, and faint downs on the corners. And in all that there was a life, animation, health, strength and there was a certain indefinable expression of voluptuousness cleverly tempered by coquetry and sophistication, which made her a most desirable creature, and justified or more than justified the liking she had roused and has continued to rouse every day.

I desired her, but I nevertheless realized that this woman, in spite of all her charms, would not fulfil my ideal; and I would not announce, "At last, I have a mistress."

I went back to de C—and said: "The lady pleases me all right, and I shall arrange to meet her. But before committing myself definitely, I should be greatly obliged if you would point out to the other indulgent beauties who did me the honour by their favourable glances, so that I could make my choice. It will be doing a great favour, if, in your role as my guide, you give me a resume of their defects and qualities, instruct me about the most advisable methods of approach and suggest to me the particular tone I should affect with them, so that I may not appear too much like a provincial or a litterateur.

"I agree," replied de C—. Do you see that lovely, dreamy swan, showing her neck so harmoniously and flapping her sleeves like wings. She is the personification of modesty; and she has the looks of the most chaste and virginal woman in the world. She has a snowy forehead, a heart of ice, the glances of a Madonna, the smile of an Agnes, a white robe and a no less white soul. She wears in her hair nothing but orange-blossoms or water-lily leaves; she is only linked to our earth by a mere thread. There has never been a sinful thought in her mind. She is profoundly ignorant of the obvious points of difference between sexes. The Holy Virgin

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is a Bacchante, compared with her. But all this does not prevent her from having more lovers than any woman I know, and really that is not saying a little. You should closely look into the bosom of that discreet lady. It is a little masterpiece; and really it is difficult to expose so much while concealing more. Tell me if, with all her prudery and inhibitions, she is ten times more immodest than the good lady on her left, who boldly displays two hemispheres which, if joined together, would form a full-sized globe—or than the other on her right, with her dress cut so low that she is parading her nudity with charming intrepidity? That virginal creature, unless I am very much mistaken, has taken a complete mental stock of the potentialities of love and passion latent in your pale complexion and in your black eyes. The reason for my saying so is that she has not, for once, looked in your direction, at least not to all appearances, for she can use her eyes so adroitly and look out of the corners so cleverly that nothing escapes her notice. One is led to think she could see out of the back of her head, as she knows perfectly well what is going on behind her. She is verily a female Janus. If you want to succeed with her, you must get rid of your uncouth and overbearing manners. You must speak to her without looking at her, unmoved, in a contrite attitude and in undertones of subdued respect. In this manner you can tell her whatever you please, provided that it is properly veiled, and she would allow you the greatest latitude in words, and later, in actions. You should take care, however, to roll your eyes tenderly when she has her breasts covered, and speak to her of the delights of platonic love and the congress of souls while employing all the time the least platonic and the least idealistic pantomime possible? She is highly sensual and very susceptible. Kiss her as much as you like. But even at the moments of the most intimate abandon, do not forget to address her as ‘Madam’ at least thrice in each



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sentence. She once got annoyed with me, because while lying in bed with her, I used the familiar expression 'Thou' instead of the formal 'you.' Ah, well not for nothing one is a honest woman."

"I have not the least inclination, after what you have told me, to risk any adventure with her, a prudish Messalina! Such a combination is unique and monstrous."

"It is as old as the world, my dear man! We see it every day, and nothing is more common. You are wrong in refusing to attach yourself of her. Her special attraction is that with her one always appears to be committing a mortal sin, and the mildest kiss seems quite damnable; while with others it hardly seems a venial offence, and often it appears quite negligible. This is why I stuck to her longer than to any other mistress. I should have still done so, if she had not left me of her own accord. She is the only woman who has forestalled me, and for this reason I respect her. She possesses certain delicate refinements of voluptuousness; and she has a peculiar art of making you feel that you are extorting from her the favours which she grants so freely; and this lends to her every favour the charm of a rape. You will meet in society at least ten of her former lovers who are prepared to swear that she is the most virtuous woman in the world. Of course she is precisely the opposite. It makes a very curious study to dissect such a virtue on a pillow. Now as you are forewarned, you run no risk, and you will not be foolish enough to fall sincerely in love with her."

"What could be her age?" I asked de C—, as it was impossible for me to guess it, even after a very close scrutiny.

"Ah, there you are! That is a mystery, and God alone can tell her age. I who boast of my powers to tell a woman's age correct to a minute, have never been able to guess hers. Approximately I should say she is between eighteen and thirty-six. I have seen her in full dress and in undress as well.

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But I still could not learn anything about her age. My experience fails me, she appears to be eighteen—but this cannot be true. She has the body of a virgin with the soul of a prostitute. And to become so thoroughly corrupt presupposes both time and genius. It needs a heart of bronze in a chest of steel. She has neither; therefore I think she is thirty-six. But, after all, I am quite at a loss."

"Has she any intimate friend who could enlighten you?"

"No. She arrived at this town two years ago; she came from the provinces or from abroad. I do not remember exactly which. This is an admirable position for a woman who knows how to profit by it. With a face like hers she can give herself whatever age she pleases; and only date from the day she came here."

"That must be very convenient, specially when an impertinent wrinkle does not appear to give you away, and time, that great destroyer, kindly tolerates the suppression of the actual date of birth."

He also pointed out to me several other beauties who, in his opinion, would favourably entertain any request I might please to address to them and would treat me with particular good-will. But the woman in red at the corner of the fire-place, and the coy dove in white who served as her antithesis were incomparably better than all others; and if they did not possess all the qualities I demanded, they had some of them, at least, in outward appearance.

I talked with them all the evening, specially with the latter, and I was careful in putting forth my ideas in the most respectful manner. Although she hardly looked at me, I thought I sometimes saw her eyes glow beneath the veil of her brows; when I risked somewhat pronounced gallantries—properly veiled they were—I perceived her blush slightly. Her colour resembled the hue that is produced when a rose-coloured liquid is poured in a semi-transparent cup. Her

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replies were generally serious and guarded, but keen and significant; they meant much more than what she expressed. Her talk was interspersed with reticences, half-expressed thoughts, and indirect allusions—each syllable of which had its own special message, and each silence its meaning. Nothing could have been more diplomatic and charming. And yet, however great the momentary pleasure of such a conversation, I could not bear it for long. It was necessary to be constantly on the alert, while what I prize most in a talk are mutual confidence and familiarity. We talked first about music; and then the conversation drifted to the opera, and later to women and love—the topic in which it is much easier to digress from generalizations to special cases. It would have made you laugh to hear me. Really, Amadis on his Rock, compared with me, would appear to be a vulgar pedant. In my conversation, there was a firework of generosity, abnegation and devotion which would have put Roman Curtius to blush. I would have never believed myself capable of such a display of pathos and nonsense. I affected the most extravagant platonism—don't you think it to be the drollest and the most comical scene possible? And what perfectly candid looks, what hypocritical manners I put on! The expressions of my face were so innocent that even any exacting mother would not scruple to allow me to share her daughter's bed, any husband would have entrusted his wife to my care. It was the evening of my life when I assumed the most virtuous airs, while all the time my mind was harbouring the most contradictory intentions. I had thought it would have been more difficult to be a hypocrite and to say things one does not mean. But now it seems it must be easy enough or I must admit I have a special aptitude for it; otherwise I would not have been so successful at my first attempt. Really I had a fine time. As for the lady, she introduced into her conversation such an interesting

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wealth of details which, in spite of her affected airs of candour, proved her extensive experience. It would be difficult to give any idea of the subtlety of her distinctions. That woman could split a hair into three shreds and could easily fool all the angelic and seraphic doctors. Besides, it is impossible to believe from her talk that she has even a shadow of a body; there is something immaterial, vapid, idealistic and incomprehensible about it. Had I not been apprised by de C—of her peculiar ways, I should certainly have despaired of any success in my venture, and would have pitifully stood aside. When a woman keeps on telling you, for two hours in the most unconcerned manner, that love only thrives on privations, sacrifice and other such admirable stuff, how can one decently hope to persuade her some day to get between two bedsheets for you to massage each other and find out whether you are both alike?

Well, we parted as great friends, congratulating each other on the purity and loftiness of our sentiments.

My conversation with the other woman, as you may well imagine, ran on exactly opposite lines. We laughed as often as we spoke, we made fun very ingeniously of all the other women in the room; I should rather add that she did it, as a man never ridicules a woman. As for me I was listening with approval, as it was impossible to find a more vivid and thorough analysis. Hers was the most quaint gallery of caricatures I have ever seen. In spite of their exaggerations, the truth underlying her portraiture was evident. De C— was right; the mission of this woman is to disillusion poets. There is about her an atmosphere of prose in which a poetic idea can never survive. She is charming, and sparkingly clever—and yet by her side only ignoble and vulgar thoughts come naturally to one's mind. As I talked to her, I felt many incongruous and improper desires surging in my mind. For instance, I longed to get drunk, I wished

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to place her on my knee and to kiss her throat, to raise her skirt to see if her garter was above or below her knee, or to sing a bawdy song at the top of my voice, to smoke a pipe or smash the windows and what not! All the brute in me was fully roused. And I would most gladly have spat on Homer's *Iliad*, and I would have knelt down before a ham. I now understand perfectly the allegory of the companions of Ulysses metamorphosed into a herd of swine by Circe. Circe was probably very much lively, like my little friend in red.

I am ashamed to confess that I experienced a very great pleasure in losing myself completely in brutishness. I did not resist my impulse—rather I promoted it with all my strength. So natural is corruption to man, and so much mud is there in the clay from which he is moulded!

However, I was a little afraid of this gangrene which was tightening its grip on me; and I wanted to leave the temptress. But it seemed as if the floor of the room had suddenly raised itself up, and I was buried in it up to my knees, and I had no strength to get out of it.

At last I tore myself away from her. It was already very late; I returned home, much distracted in mind and greatly perplexed, not knowing what to do. I was hesitating between the prude and the courtesan. I could find voluptuousness in one and piquancy in the other. After having critically analyzed my mind, I realized that I had no love for either of them, but I desired them far too intensely.

By all appearances, my old friend! I shall make love to one of these two women or perhaps to both. Yet their possession will leave me but half satisfied, though they are quite pretty. Their sight will not evoke within me anything which could shout forth in bated breath: "These are the women I wanted." I did not recognize them. Yet I do not believe I could get anyone better, from the standpoint of beauty and good breeding. De C—advises me to seek none

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else. Certainly I will follow his advice; and one or the other shall be my mistress or the devil will get hold of me before long. But in the depths of my heart, a secret voice reproaches me for playing false to love and for having picked up the first smiling woman whom I do not really love, instead of seeking ceaselessly in all corners of the globe, in palaces or in taverns, for the woman who has been destined by the Providence for me, whether a princess or a chambermaid, a virgin or a *demi-mondaine*.

Then I blame myself for spinning a web of wild fancies. After all, it would be just the same to me, if this woman or another becomes my mistress. In any case, it will not cause the earth to deviate an inch from its course, nor will it upset the rhythmic sequence of the seasons. It is foolish of me to worry over such nonsense. But all my reasoning could not ease my mind, nor could it make me more determined. This is perhaps due to my living too much within myself, and as a result I tend to magnify unduly the trifling details of my life. I am excessively engrossed in my own ways of living and thinking. I hear the beat of arteries, the pulsations of my heart. I disentangle my most elusive ideas from the thick vapour in which they are floating, and I give them a material body and shape. Had I been more active, I would not have perceived all these trifles, and could not have wasted my time examining my soul under a microscope, as I do now all day long. The din of action would scare away the host of idle thoughts which flutter about in my head and simply confuse me with their buzzing. Instead of running after phantoms, I would grapple with realities. I should ask of women for what they can give—pleasure, instead of seeking to embrace I know not what fantastic ideas adorned in nebulous perfection. This relentless straining of my soul's eye towards an invisible aim has perverted my sight. I am deprived of the

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power to see what exists, for having so long stared at what does not. And my eye, so sharp and piercing where the ideal is concerned, becomes quite short-sighted when confronted with the reality. So, I have known women whom everybody finds charming—but I did not think them so. I have greatly admired which most people considered bad; and some eccentric or unintelligible verses gave me more pleasure than the most elegant productions. I should not be surprised, if after sighing so much after the moon and gazing so intently at the stars, after composing so many elegies and sentimental rhapsodies, I were to fall in love with a disreputable prostitute or an ugly old harriidan. It would be a fitting *finale*! Reality will thus avenge itself for being so long neglected. Will it not be meet, if I fall into a romantic passion for an ugly, unclean woman, or for an abominable hussy?

Could you picture me fiddling my guitar under a balcony only to be hustled out by the lackey that carries the lap-dog of an old dowager who just spat out her last tooth?

Perhaps having failed to find in this world an object worthy of my love, shall I end by adoring myself like Narcissus of old. To preserve myself from such a calamity I gaze at my own reflexion in every mirror or in every stream on my way. Truly, through my reveries and aberrations, I have a serious apprehension of falling into something monstrous and unnatural. That would be tragic indeed, and I must beware of it. Good-bye, friend, I am in a hurry. I am in hurry to see the lady in red, lest I might fall back into my usual day-dreams. I do not think there would be anything very spiritual in what we shall do, even though she is a very spiritual creature. I roll up and keep aside the pattern of ideal mistress, as I do not want to contrast it with her. I wish to enjoy quietly the charms and special gifts she possesses. I want her to wear what will fit her correctly.

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and I should not try to clothe her in the garment that I had selected in my imagination for my dream-woman.

This sounds a wise resolution; but I do not know whether I shall live up to it. Once more, good-bye.

### III

I AM now the lover of the woman in red. With me this has become almost a profession which gives me some stability in the world. No longer do I look like a school-boy seeking an adventure among the grandmothers, and not daring to recite a madrigal to any woman who has not reached her hundredth birthday. I perceive I am now being esteemed a great deal more highly than before.

Women now speak to me with a jealous coquetry and they make much of me. Men, on the other hand, have become rather lukewarm; even in the course of our infrequent intercourse, there is an evident undercurrent of hostility and constraint in their manners. They scent in me a rival who may become still more dangerous in the near future. It has been reported to me that many of them have bitterly criticized me. They say that my dress is too effeminate, that my hair is groomed with too meticulous care—that all this, with my beardless face, gives me a ridiculously foppish appearance, that my clothes are expensive, and loud in colour, which smell of the theatre—that I look more of a comedian: in fact all the trivialities that one indulges in to cover up the fact that he is clad in poor, ill-fitting, dirt clothes. But it all only serves to raise me in the estimation of the women; they think my hair is beautiful; they appreciate my attention to details as a sign of my good taste; they seem to be quite disposed to compensate me for the expenses I incur for their benefit, as they are not simple enough to



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believe that all my elegance is solely meant for my personal embellishment.

The hostess seemed to be a little piqued by my choice, which she thought ought to have fallen on herself; and for some days she displayed a certain hostility towards her rival, though she continued to treat me as before. It was evident in the cut-and-dried manner in which she addressed her rival—which is the monopoly of women only—and in the adverse comments which she made about her dress loudly. For instance, she would remark: "Your hair is dressed too high, and it does not at all suit your face," or "Your corsage is rather loose under the arms. Where on earth did you get it?" or, "Your eyes have got black rings, I find you so altered," and a thousand such petty comments; to these the other replied in a correspondingly caustic fashion at the earliest opportunity available. If the opportunity was not soon forthcoming, she used to improvise one for her ready use; and she duly gave back as much as she received. But some other affair having soon distracted the attention of the slighted woman, this petty war of words ceased, and the normal order was restored. I have told you briefly that I am the official lover of the lady in red; but I suppose that will not satisfy a punctilious man like you. You, no doubt, want to know her name. But I shall not disclose her real name. For the purpose of my story, however, I will call her Rosette after the colour of the frock in which I first saw her. It is a pretty name, and my first dog was given this name.

You would naturally want to hear the story of my love-affair in all its details, as you are a stickler for precision in such affairs. You would want to know the progress of my amours with this lady, how I passed from the general to the particular, from the role of a spectator to that of the actor. I will gratify your curiosity with the greatest pleasure. There

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is nothing sinister in our romance. It is all rosy, and the only tears shed are those of pleasure. It is free from delays or repetitions, and everything marches on to the end with that speed and rapidity so highly recommended by Horace; it is just like a French novel. Do not, however imagine that I carried the fortress at the first assault. The princess, although humane towards her subject, is not at first so prodigal of her favours, as you might think. She knows too well of their value to give them away easily. She is fully aware how a specious delay quickens desire and that partial resistance adds "pep" to pleasure. So, she would not surrender herself to you at first, however keen may be the appetite you have excited in her.

To narrate the whole story, I must start from the very beginning. I gave you the report of our first meeting. I met her once, twice and for the third time at the same place. Then she invited me to her house. There was no need to press me for this favour, as you can well imagine. I went there discreetly at first, then a little more frequently, and afterwards whenever I wished, and she admitted me even three or four times in one day. Even when there was only a few hours' interval, she welcomed me warmly as if I had just come back from the East Indies. This touched me very much, and I felt obliged to show my gratitude in the most gallant and tender manner, and she, on her part, responded as intensely as possible.

Rosette, as we have agreed to call her by this name, is a woman of vivacious spirits who has an admirable understanding of men. Though she delayed for some time playing the final act of the drama, I have never been angry with her—really a very unique thing, for you know well how quickly I lose my temper when my desires are thwarted or when a woman fails to respond at the expected hour. I do not know how it came about. But from our first meeting, I

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was convinced that she would be mine, and I was then more certain of it than if I held in my hand her promise duly signed and sealed. It might perhaps be said that her free and familiar manners encouraged me to cherish such high hopes. I do not think, however, that it was the real reason. I have seen some women, whose extraordinary boldness, though removing every shadow of doubt, never produced this effect on me, and I have been timid and cautious in their company.

I am generally less amiable to the women I like than to those who are indifferent to me. It is because I feverishly wait for an opportunity, and I have doubts about my ultimate success. It makes me gloomy and pensive, and while in this mood, I am bereft of any initiative or presence of mind. When I perceive the hours slipping away in vain I am beside myself with the anger, and I cannot help making bitter and satirical remarks which are sometimes quite brutal and which only serve to hinder my progress hundredfold. With Rosette, I never felt anything like that. And even when she resisted me most strongly, never had I the impression that she wanted to escape from me. I quietly allowed her to display all her conquests, and accepted patiently all the delays she preferred to impose on my ardours. In her firmness she betrayed a certain tender affability which soothed me greatly, and in her cruelty, there was visible an element of broad humanity which removed all cause for serious alarm. Honest women, even when they behave in the most contrary way, have sulky and disdainful manner which I simply cannot bear. They always appear to be ready to ring for their servants to throw you out of doors. It seems to me that when a man takes the trouble to court a woman—which is not always a pleasant job at that—he does not deserve to be looked at in that way.

Dear Rosette does never assume such looks, and thereby,

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I assure you, she is the gainer. She is the only woman to whom I showed my real self. And I can boast that I was never so better than I am now. My mind has expanded greatly, and by encountering her clever and brilliant repartees, I have come to discover my latent gifts, and to learn to excel myself. It is true that I have not been very poetic, but that would have been impossible with her. Yet she has some poetry in her in spite of all what de C—has told me. But she is so full of life, strength and movement; she obviously fits in so well with her environments that one does not wish her to leave them to soar into the clouds. She lives her life so fully and agreeably, and makes it so amusing for herself and for others as well, that no dream has anything better to offer.

It is a miracle that I have already known her two months and never have I yet been bored except when not in her company. You will certainly admit that no mediocre woman could have accomplished that, as usually women produce the opposite effect on me, and they please me better when at a distance.

Rosette has the best of temper with me—be it added—for with women she is as wicked as the devil. She is gay, lively, alert, ever ready for anything, quite original in her talk, and always has some charming and unconventional witicism to tell you. She is a delightful companion, a beautiful comrade with whom one can be very intimate,—rather than a mistress; and if I were a few years older and were troubled with fewer romantic ideas, that would be quite satisfying to me, and I should consider myself the happiest mortal in the world. But . . . but . . . (this particle never anticipates anything good, and yet it is unfortunately the most widely used restrictive in the world). I am an idiot, an imbecile, a veritable goose, never satisfied with anything and always hankering for the meridian sun late in the

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afternoon. And instead of being perfectly happy I am only partially so. Though this itself would count a lot in our imperfect world, still I find it is not enough.

In the eyes of the world I have a mistress who is desired and envied by man, and scorned by none. Apparently then my desire is fulfilled, and I have no longer any excuse for picking up a quarrel with destiny. Still I do not feel that I have a mistress. And if I am suddenly asked whether I have one, I believe I should say "No". Moreover, the possession of a woman who has beauty, youth and wit constitutes what in all times and in all lands has been styled as having a mistress, and I do not think it could be otherwise. But all the same I entertain the strongest doubts on this matter, so much so that if several persons conspire to convince me that I am not Rosette's devoted lover, I would ultimately agree with them in spite of the palpable evidence to the contrary.

Do not, from all this, conclude that I do not love her or that she displeases me in any way. On the contrary, I love her deeply and I find her a pretty and vivacious creature, as everybody else does. I simply do not feel she belongs to me—that is all. And yet no other woman ever gave me so much joy, and it is in her arms that I have experienced the sweetest pleasure of the senses. A single kiss of her, or her most chaste caress sends a maddening thrill all through my body down to the soles of my feet, and makes my blood rush to my heart. Although I admit all this, what I told you before remains true. But a man's heart is full of such absurdities, and it would be a pretty hard task to attempt at reconciling all these contradictions.

How does it all happen, I really cannot say. I see her all day and even at night if I like. I caress her in any fashion I prefer, dressed or undressed, in town or in country. Her complaisance knows no exhaustion, and she gladly submits

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to all my whims, however strange they may be. One evening I hit upon a novel idea to make love to her in the drawing room with all candles lighted, fire burning at the hearth, all the arm-chairs arranged for a grand reception as it were; she herself attired in her most splendid evening dress with her fan and flowers, all her diamonds on her neck and fingers and plumes on her head, while I was dressed up as a bear. She consented to it. When everything was ready, the servants were ordered to close every door and not to let in anybody. They were surprised at these instructions, and they looked so foolish that we could not help laughing. They must have thought their mistress had gone mad—but we did not care a bit what they were thinking.

That evening was the drollest in my life. Can you imagine what I must have looked with my plumed hat under my "pad," rings on all my "claws," a small silver-hilted sword with a pale blue ribbon on its sheath? I came near the belle, and after making a nice bow to her I sat close to her and besieged her in every way. The madrigals and exaggerated gallantries that I addressed her, all the gibberish of the occasion were taking on an odd hue from my bear's muzzle, as I had on a beautiful bear's head made of painted cardboard, which I was soon compelled to throw under the table, so highly adorable was my mistress and so madly I wanted to kiss her hand etc. The skin soon followed the head. I was panting more than usual: Then the evening dress came in for my attentions, as you will believe, the plumes were falling like snow around her and soon her shoulders were out of her sleeves, her bust from her corset, her feet from her shoes and her legs from her stockings. Her necklaces rolled down to the floor, and I believe that never was fresher dress more pitilessly crumpled and crushed. It was made of silver gauze and lined with white satin. Rosette displayed on that occasion a heroism well above that of her sex and

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it gave me a high opinion of her. She witnessed the sack of her toilette like a disinterested spectator and never showed the slightest concern for her dress and laces. On the contrary she was madly gay and herself helped to break or tear off what could not be untied. Do you not think it a fine feat to record in history along with the most brilliant actions of the heroes of old? It is the greatest proof of love that a woman can give her lover when she does not tell him: "Take care not to ruffle or stain my frock" especially when it is a new one. A new frock is for a husband a greater motive of security than is commonly realized. Rosette must be adoring me, or else her philosophy must be superior to that of Epictetus.

However, I feel, I well repaid Rosette the value of her frock, though in a currency which is no legal tender with shopkeepers, but was nevertheless duly accepted and appreciated. So much heroism deserved a compensation. Moreover, generous as she is, she returned me all I gave her. I enjoyed myself madly, almost convulsively, so much that I would not have believed myself capable of it. These loud kisses accompanied with resounding laughs, those trembling, impatient caresses, all those tempestuous and irritating lusts, the pleasures baulked of their complete enjoyment by the peculiar costume and the situation, but still a hundred times keener than if they had been unimpeded—tended to unnerve me so much that I suffered from spasms from which I recovered with great difficulty. You could never picture to yourself the pride and tenderness in Rosette's eyes while she tried to bring me round, and the joy not unmixed with anxiety in her movements. She was still radiant with the pleasure she felt in having produced such a grand effect on me, while her eyes, wet with soft tears, showed the extent of her fears at my discomfiture and her solicitude for my recovery. There was something so noble, chaste and maternal

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in her eye that I forgot the scene we had just enacted, and knelt before her and begged her leave to kiss her hand, which she granted with a curious gravity and dignity.

Assuredly she is not so depraved as de C—paints her, and as she very often seemed to me. Her corruption is in her mind, and not in her heart.

It is just one among a score of such scenes that I have cited now. It is obvious that after all this, a man could call himself her lover without any undue conceit. Well, it is exactly what I do not. Hardly had I gone back home than the old idea recurred to me and worried me again. I recalled in mind what I had done and witnessed. The simplest gestures and poses, and the minutest details came back very clearly and vividly in my memory. I remembered everything down to the slightest inflexion in her voice, the imperceptible shades in her pleasure. Only it did not appear to me so certain whether it had happened to me rather than to another person. I was not sure that it was not an illusion, a phantasmagoria, a dream or something I had read somewhere or even a tale of my invention as I often make up. I feared to be the dupe of my credulity or playboy of some hallucination. In spite of the positive proofs afforded by my physical exhaustion and by other facts, for example, my absence overnight from my own house, I could easily have believed that I had slept under my bed till morning.

It makes me very unhappy to be incapable of obtaining the moral certitude of a fact of which I have the physical certainty. Usually what happens is the reverse of that, and it is the fact that proves the idea; I should like to prove the act by the idea. But I cannot do so. Strange though it may sound, it is nevertheless true. Up to a certain point the possession of a mistress depends upon my own capacity; but I cannot convince myself that I have one, although I really have her. If I have not in me the necessary faith for believ-



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ing so obvious a fact, it is as impossible for me to believe a very simple fact as it is for others to believe in the mystery of Trinity. Faith cannot be acquired; it is a gift, a special dispensation from heaven.

Never has any one desired so much as I have to live some other person's life and to assimilate another nature. Nobody has failed so badly. Whatever I may do, other men appear to me but phantoms, and I do not feel their existence. Yet that is not due to lack of desire on my part to know their real life and to participate in it; what is wanting in my nature is the gift of real sympathy. The existence or non-existence of a thing or a person does not sufficiently interest me so much as to affect me in a sensible and convincing manner. The sight of a man or a woman who appears to me in real life leaves on my mind no stronger impression than the fantastic vision of a dream. There moves around me a pale world of shadows, of real or false apparitions, flitting hither and thither, in the midst of which I find myself as perfectly alone as possible, for they exert no influence upon me for good or evil, and they all seem to be of a totally different nature from mine. When I speak to them and they reply with their habitual commonsense, I feel as much surprised as if my cat or my dog had suddenly learnt to speak and joined me in the conversation. The sound of their voice always startles me, and I could easily believe that they are only fugitive appearances of which I act as the reflecting mirror. Whether inferior or superior, most certainly I do not belong to their species. There are moments when I recognize only God above me, and I could recognize others when I consider myself hardly the equal of the beetle under a stone or a mollusc on a sand bank. But in whatever state of mind I am, whether high or low, I have never been able to persuade myself that other men are really like myself. When I am addressed "Sir" or spoken of as "this man", I

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think it very strange. My very name seems to me unreal. But however softly it may be uttered in the midst of a loud uproar, I start suddenly with a febrile and convulsive jerk, which I never could explain. Is it the fear of finding an antagonist or an enemy in that man who knows my name and to whom I am no longer one of the crowd?

It is especially when I have lived with a woman that I have most clearly felt how strongly my nature repels at any alliance or fusion. I am like a drop of oil in a glass of water. You may stir both together as much as you like, but the oil will never mix with water; the drop will be split into a hundred thousand tiny globules which will reunite and appear again on the surface the moment you cease shaking it. The drop of oil and the glass of water—this sums up all my life history.

Sensual pleasure—the diamond chain which unites all beings, this all-consuming fire which melts the rocks and the metals of the soul and dissolves them into tears, just as real fire dissolves iron and granite—has never been able to subdue or soften me. My senses are, however, very keen and sharp but my soul is at constant war with my body. This unhappy couple, as any other pair, legally or illegally united, lives, in a state of perpetual warfare. A woman's arms, which are reputed to be the tightest bonds on earth, have but a very weak hold on me. Never do I feel more detached from my mistress as when she presses me to her bosom; I get stifled, that is all.

How many times have I been angry with myself! How insistently I tried to be different! How have I exhorted myself to be tender, loving, passionate—without much success! How often did I not force my soul to share in my acts of love? Whatever I did, it always recoiled directly I set it free. What a torture it must be for my poor soul to assist

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at the debaucheries of my body and to perpetually attend the feasts where it gets nothing to eat!

It is with Rosette that I have made up my mind to discover whether I am not altogether unsociable, and to prove if I can take sufficient interest in another person's existence. I have exhausted myself with my experiments without setting my doubts at rest. With her my pleasure is so keen that the soul is rather often, if not actually, touched at least distracted; and this prejudices one's observations. After all, I perceived that it was only skin-deep, and that I had only superficial pleasure in which the soul participated only out of sheer curiosity. I have enjoyed some pleasure because I am young and passionate; but the pleasure came from within, and not from outside. It is derived from myself rather than from Rosette. However persistently I may try I cannot emerge from myself for a moment.

I am the same person as before—a very bored and tiresome person; and this fact displeases me greatly. I never succeeded in introducing into my brain the consciousness that there are other people, or into my soul the sentiments of other persons, or into my body the sorrow or pleasure of another.

I am a prisoner within myself, and to escape is impossible. The prisoner wants to run away, the doors are ready to let him pass out and the walls are willing to crumble down. I know not what inscrutable fatality holds back every stone in its place and every bolt in its socket! It is just as impossible to admit some one else into myself as it is to transfer myself into another. I know not how to play the host or the guest, and I find myself in a melancholy isolation in the midst of a crowd. My bed is not widowed, but my heart is always so.

Ah! what a dreary prospect! I fail to raise my stature by even one single particle or an atom. I cannot make th

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blood of another run into my veins. I have been fated to see always through my eyes, never more clearly nor farther nor more differently than before—to listen to sounds with the same ears and with the same emotion—to touch with the same fingers—to perceive everything always through the same organ—to be condemned to the same phrases and words! I am fated to lack the power to fly from myself and to take refuge in some unapproachable corner, I am forced to keep to myself for ever—to dine, to sleep all alone and to act the same role to twenty different women; to drag into the strangest situations of the drama of life a person whose part you have learnt by heart; to think the same thoughts, to dream the same dreams! What a torture, what a boredom is all this!

I have desired the horns of the brothers Tangut, the hat of Fortunatusfi, the wand of Abaries, the ring of Gyges. I would have sold my soul for the magic ring of some fairy. But I have never yearned for anything so much as, like Tiresias the soothsayer, to encounter in the mountains those strange serpents which can change their sex at will; and what I most envy in the monstrous Indian gods is their peculiar attribute of undergoing countless transformations.

I began by wishing I were another person; then by reflecting that I could, by analogy, anticipate what it would be like and therefore avoid the surprise and change that I would expect. I would have preferred to be a woman. This idea always recurs to me when I have a mistress who is not ugly. For an ugly woman is to me just a man, and in moments of pleasure I would willingly exchange my role with her, for it is very annoying not to have a consciousness of the effect one produces and to lack the capacity to judge of the enjoyment of others except by one's own. These thoughts have often made me gloomy and reflective even at an un-

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seasonable hour; and as a result, I have been accused—wrongly though—of coldness and infidelity.

Rosette who fortunately does not know all that thinks that I am the happiest lover on earth. She takes my futile rage for passion, and gladly submits to all the capricious experiments I care to devise.

I have done everything possible to convince myself that I possessed her; I tried to get into the innermost depths of her heart but always cried halt at the first step; that is to say I did not go beyond her skin or mouth. Notwithstanding our physical intimacies, I feel that there is nothing common in us. Never has any idea akin to mine flashed in her pretty, young head. Never has that heart, so full of life and fire, the motive power of a breast so pure and firm, beaten in unison with my own. Never has my soul been united with hers. Cupid, the winged god of love, did not kiss Psyche on her beautiful, ivory brow. No! that woman is not my mistress.

If you only knew all I did to force my soul to share my body's raptures! With what fury have I fastened my mouth to hers, buried my hands into her hair and squeezed her supple and round waist. As of old Salmacis, the lover of young Hermaphroditos, I tried to melt her body into mine. I have drunk her breath and the warm tears trickling voluptuously from the overflowing chalice of her eyes. The more our bodies were entwined in closest embrace, the less I loved her. My soul sadly looked with despair on this lamentable hymen to which it was not invited, and veiled its face in disgust, and silently wept under the cover of its mantle. All that because I was not really in love with Rosette, though she was so lovable, and I desired her so much.

To rid myself of my self-obsession, I conjured up strange worlds and situations where it was quite improbable that I could recognize myself, and being unable to cast aside my

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individuality totally, I have tried to keep it down almost beyond recognition. I have, however, met with scant success, and this devil of "myself" pursues me obstinately everywhere. It is impossible to shake it off, I have not the necessary resources to tell it, as I used to do in the case of other unwelcome visitors, that I am not at home or I am gone away to the country.

I joined my mistress in her bath and I acted the Triton to the best of my ability. The sea was represented by a large marble basin where the water, limpid though it was, seemed to conceal something of the Nereid's exquisite charms. Once we enjoyed a very pleasant evening in the gondola to the accompaniment of music by moonlight. That would have been quite commonplace in Venice, but here it was a novelty. In her carriage, darting along the road, sometimes illumined by street-lamps, sometimes in the deep darkness, we spent a delightful time with its jerks and jolts. Such a style has its own piquancy. But I do not advise you to do so. I have forgotten you are a venerable patriarch, and not fond of such refinements. I have climbed through her window, though the key of her room was in my pocket. I have persuaded her to call upon me in broad daylight, and compromised her so thoroughly that no one now, with the exception of myself doubts that she is my mistress.

In spite of all these extravagant devices which, were I not so young, would appear like the tricks of a worn-out libertine, Rosette adores me more than any one. She discerns in them the ardour of an uncontrollable and petulant love, which remains ever the same in spite of difference of time and space. She sees in them the unabated effects of her charms and the triumph of her beauty; and really I wish she were right, for in all justice it is neither her fault nor mine that she is not.

My only wrong towards her is that I cannot get out of

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myself. If I told her so, she would promptly reply that in her eyes this was my greatest merit—a reply which would be more polite than sensible.

Once, during the first stage of our liaison I thought I had achieved my goal for a moment. I believed I loved her. O, my friend, that moment was the only one I have truly lived! And if that minute had been an hour, I should have become a god. We had gone for a ride, I on my good Farragus and she on a snow-white mare which looked like a unicorn, so slender were her legs and slim her neck. We were walking down a great avenue of elms of prodigious height. The sun descended on us warm and bright, though tempered by the foliage. In the sky, long lines of pale blue clouds stretched across the edges of the horizon, and changed into very soft apple-green when they met the orange tints of the sunset. The aspect of the sky was charming and quaint, and the breeze was redolent of the captivating perfume of wild flowers. Now and again a bird flew before us and crossed the avenue, singing. The bell of a village beyond our ken softly rang out the Angelus, and its silvery tones, softened by distance, were infinitely sweet. Our mounts walked side by side at exactly even pace. My heart was expanding, and my soul overflowed with happiness. Never had I felt so happy. I was silent, and so was Rosette too. And yet never before had we so well understood each other. We were so close that my leg touched Rosette's mare. I leaned towards her, and put my arm around her waist; she made an identical movement and laid her head upon my shoulder. Our mouths joined in a chaste and most delightful kiss. Our horses walked on with bridles on their necks. I felt Rosette's arm relax, and her body bend lower. I myself became weak, and was going to faint. Ah! I can assure you that at that moment I hardly considered whether I was myself or some one also. We went on in that posture till we reached the

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end of the avenue, when the sound of footsteps made us quickly resume our proper positions. It was a mounted patrol who saluted us. If I had pistols with me, I believe I would have fired. I was frowning at them with a dark and furious mien which must have seemed very strange. After all I was wrong to lose my temper, because this interruption rendered me a great service by cutting short my pleasure at the precise moment when from its sheer intensity, it was getting painful, and was almost overpowered by its own violence. To stop at the right moment is an art which is not however, always cultivated. Sometimes in bed with a woman, when you pass an arm around her waist, at first you feel a pleasing sensation through the warmth of her body, her soft and velvety flesh and the polished ivory of her sides. The belle falls asleep in this lovely, charming position. Her muscles loosen, and her head rolls on her hair. However, your arm is pressed upon more heavily, you begin to perceive that she is a woman, and not a sylph. But you would not remove your arm for anything on earth—and for good reasons too. It is dangerous to wake up a woman with whom you have shared the bed, unless you are in a position to substitute for her delicious dream a still more delicious reality. Then, again, by requesting her to raise herself a little to allow you to remove your arm, you would indirectly insinuate that she is rather heavy and she tires you—which is very rude; or else it means that you are weak and worn out, a most humiliating fact which would lower you in her estimation. There is another reason; as you have already derived some pleasure from this posture you believe it will continue to yield more—which is, by the way—a mistaken idea.

Your poor arm is thus caught under an oppressive weight, the blood stops flowing, nerves are strained, and the cramp pricks you with its thousand needles. You become



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a sort of little Milton the Crotoniate, and the mattress and the back of your divinity represent exactly the two parts of to relieve you of your martyrdom and you leap from the bed the tree that are folded together. The day dawns at last with more alacrity than ever a husband did from the nuptial scaffold.

Such is the history of my passions and of all pleasures. In spite of the interruption or because of it, never did I experience such a sensation before. I began to feel that I was really another person. Rosette's soul had completely entered into my body; my soul had left me and filled her heart just as hers had filled mine. No doubt they met on the way in that long "equestrian" kiss (as Rosette had phrased it) we exchanged; our twin souls intermingled as intimately as the souls of two mortal creatures could upon a grain of perishable clay.

Surely angels must kiss in that fashion and the true paradise is not in distant heaven, but upon the mouth of the beloved.

I have waited in vain for another such moment, and failed in my attempts to bring it back again. We went often on horse back through the avenues in the forest at sunset but to us the sun looked dull, the leaves lifeless. The note of the birds seemed harsh and discordant, for harmony was no longer in us. We slackened the pace of our horses, and tried a similar kiss. Alas! though our lips met, it was only a spectre of our old kiss. The beautiful, sublime, divine kiss, the only real kiss I ever exchanged—has melted away for ever, never to return. Since that day I only returned from the woods with an inexpressible sadness. Rosette herself, gay and frolicsome as she is, never could escape an identical impression; and this mood of hers is betrayed by slight, delicately puckered pout which is, at least, as charming as her smile.

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Only the fumes of wine and the brilliant lights of the candles rid me of those melancholy moods. We drink in silence, like men sentenced to death, one glass after another, until we reach the proper limits. Then we begin to laugh heartily and joke merrily at what we describe as our sentimentality.

We only laugh because we cannot cry. Ah! what could draw a tear from my exhausted eyes?

Why did I feel so much pleasure that evening? I could hardly tell. Yet I was the same man, Rosette the same woman. It was not my first ride, nor was it hers. We had seen sunsets before, and that spectacle had not moved us any more than the sight of an admirable picture with its brilliant colours. There are other avenues of elm or chestnut tree in the world, and that one was not the first we walked through. What is it then that made us discover such superb charm that transformed the dead leaves into topaz and the green foliage into emerald, that had gilded all those fluttering fragments and changed into pearls all the drops of water scattered over the lawn, which gave such sweet harmony to the sounds of a usually discordant bell and to the chirpings of all kinds of little birds. There must have been in the air a deeply inherent poetry, since even our horses seemed to feel it.

No scenery in the world, however, could have been more pastoral and simple : trees, clouds, a few scattered branches, a woman and a ray of the setting sun falling upon the scene like a golden chevron on a coat of arms. Nor did I have any feeling of surprise and astonishment. I recognized the spot. I never afterwards visited the place without recollecting perfectly the shape of the foliage, the position of the clouds in the sky, the white dove hurrying across the sky and flying in the same direction. That little silvery bell that I had heard for the first time often rang in my ears ; and

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its note seemed to me like the voice of a friend. Without ever going there, I had in imagination traversed that avenue many times in company of princesses mounted on unicorns. The most voluptuous of my dreams had its location there, and my desires had exchanged kisses just like Rosette and myself did. There was not much novelty for me in that kiss, for it was exactly such as I thought it would be. It was perhaps the only time in my life that I was not disappointed, when the reality appeared to me as beautiful as the ideal. If I could find a woman, a landscape, an architecture, or something answering to my inmost desires as perfectly as that grand moment produced a fulfilment of my dreams, I should have nothing to envy from the gods and I would willingly forfeit my place in the paradise. But, in reality, I do not believe that a man of flesh and blood could resist for an hour such penetrating pleasure. Two such kisses would drain out a whole existence, and would create a complete void in soul and body. I do not, however, mean that such considerations would stop me. As it is not possible for me to prolong life indefinitely, death is of little concern to me; and I would rather die of pleasure than of old age or ennui.

But this woman does not exist. If she exists, I am perhaps only separated from her by a partition. I have probably touched her while passing yesterday or to-day.

How does Rosette differ from that woman? I simply do not believe that she could be Rosette. By what fatality do I love the mistresses whom I do not love? Her neck is pretty enough to wear the most beautiful necklace, her fingers are finely tapered to do proper justice to the most expensive and loveliest rings, rubies would blush with pleasure at the prospect of gleaming sparkingly by the pink lobes of her comely ears, her waist could glory in the girdle of Venus; but it is only Cupid who knows how to fasten his mother's sash. All Rosette's merit lies in herself; I have lent her nothing. I

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have not thrown over her beauty that mantle of perfection in which the lover envelops the person of the beloved. The veil of Isis is transparent in comparison with that one. Only satiety can possibly lift its corners.

I am not in love with Rosette. At least, the love I have for her if I have any—does not resemble the idea I have made of love. It may be that my idea is erroneous. I do not dare to pronounce any judgment. The fact remains, however, that it has made me quite insensible to the charms of other women, and I have not desired any other since I have known her. If she must be jealous, it can only be of phantoms, and she does not worry much about them. The only serious rival she has to fear is my imagination. This is a fact which, with all her cleverness she will probably never be able to discover.

If ever women could know that! How many infidelities the least flighty lover commits against his most beloved mistress! It may be presumed that women do likewise or even worse. But like us, they say nothing. A mistress is like an ordinary theme, which usually disappears beneath flourish and improvization. Very often the kisses she receives are not meant for her. It is the idea of another woman that is kissed in her person, and more than once she reaps the benefit (if it can be termed as benefit) of the desires inspired by another. Ah, poor Rosette, how many times have you served as the incarnation of my dreams and given a reality to your rival! Of how many infidelities have you unwittingly been the accomplice! If you could have known at the moment my arms embraced you so closely, when my mouth was pressed so lovingly against your own, that your own beauty and love counted very little, that you were a thousand miles away from my thoughts; if you had been told that my eyes, veiled with amorous languor, were cast down in order to avoid you and to preserve

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the illusion that you only served to complete, and that you were only an effort of my imagination, instead of being a mistress you are only the instrument of my sensuality and a means of deceiving a desire impossible of realization! O celestial creatures, diaphanous virgins of frail beauty, who lower your blue eyes and clasp your lily hands upon the golden-framed pictures of the old German masters, you saints in stained-glass windows, you martyrs from the missals who smile so sweetly in the midst of scrolls of arabesques, and who emerge so blonde and fresh from the bell of flowers! O you beautiful courtesans, reclining in all nudity upon beds strewn with roses, beneath large purple curtains, with your bracelets and pearl necklaces, your fan and mirrors, in which the setting sun is reflected amid the shadows! Dark maidens of Titian who voluptuously display your undulating hips, your firm thighs, your glossy abdomen, supple and muscular backs! Ancient goddesses whose white phantoms hover beneath the shades of the garden! You are all inmates of my seraglio. I have adored you all in turn. Saint Ursula, I have kissed your beautiful hands in those of Rosette: I have played with the black tresses of Muranese, and never before had Rosette so much ado in rearranging her hair. Virgin Diana, I have been a more ardent admirer of you than Actaeon, and I have not been changed into a stag. It was I who replaced your beautiful Endymion! How many unsuspected rivals there are, against whom no revenge is possible. And yet they are not always painted or sculptured.

Women, when your lover is more and unusually tender, when he clasps you in his arms with overwhelming emotion, when he plunges his head between your knees and raises it again to gaze upon with moist, wandering eyes, when pleasure only tends to intensify his desires, and he chokes your voice with kisses as though afraid to listen to it, then

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you must be certain that he is not aware of your presence, that he is keeping an appointment with a chimera which you render palpable by acting its role. Many chamber-maids have profited by the love which is inspired by queens. Many women have derived benefit from the love which goddesses have inspired. Often a vulgar reality has served as the pedestal for the idealized idol. This explains why the poets do generally have ugly hags as mistresses. One may for ten years lie in bed with a woman, without even seeing her. This is the story of many great geniuses whose obscure humiliating relations have been a puzzle to the world.

I have been unfaithful to Rossette only after this fashion. I have only deceived her with pictures and statues, and she has been a partial accomplice to this betrayal. I have not upon my conscience the slightest material transgression to reproach myself with. In this respect, I am as white as the snow upon the Jungfrau, and yet without being in love with anyone. I desire to be so. I do not seek any opportunity, nor will I look askance at it, when I get one. If it appears, perhaps I should not make use of it, for I have an inner conviction that it would be just the same with another. In that case, I prefer Rosette to any other. Now, in this woman, I have at least a pretty and vivacious comrade, who is most agreeably demoralized person, and this consideration is not the least of the ties which bind me to her, for in losing her, I will grieve at the loss of the friend. Do you know that for months, which seem like five eternities, I have been the Celadon, the devoted admirer of Madame Rosette. This was all very beautiful. I could never imagine myself so consistent, nor did she, I could easily bet. We are really a couple of doves, as only doves could possibly be so tender. What an enchanting life we have lived! We cooed, and we clung to each other like ivy. Nothing could be more moving!

#### IV

FOR five months we have met every day and almost every evening, with the door barred against outsiders. The very thought of such a situation is intriguing! Ah, well, one thing I must say to the glory of the incomparable Rosette—I was not bored, and probably these months have been the most pleasant in my life. I do not think it possible for any woman to occupy in a more sustained, entertaining fashion a man who is devoid of passion; and God alone knows how terrible is the disenchantment produced by an empty heart. It is hard to estimate how resourceful that woman is. How artfully she takes advantage of the tinniest spark, and how cleverly she magnifies it to a blazing flame. How adroitly she directs the slightest movements of the soul! How skillfully she can turn languor into a tender reverie! And by how many devious methods can she bring back to herself the mind which has strayed far away. It is marvellous, and I admire her as one of the greatest geniuses who has ever lived.

Sometime I visited her in a sullen, angry mood, ready to pick up a quarrel. I do not know how the witch of this woman has managed it, but in a few minutes she has wrung from me gallantries, the last thing I expected of myself; in spite of my bad temper, I was made to kiss her hands and to join in a hearty laughter. Can you imagine the extent of her tyranny? But, however clever she may be, this sort of life cannot be prolonged any further.

Once during the last fortnight I did something which I had never done before; I picked up a book from her table, and read a few lines in between our conversation. Rosette noticed it with a feeling of terror which she was unable to conceal; and she removed all the books from her boudoir. I must admit that I regretted this step though I did not dare

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to ask her to restore them. The other day—a terrible omen—someone came while we were together, and instead of flying into a rage, as I used to do, I was rather glad about it. I behaved almost amiably, and I kept the conversation going, though Rosette tried to bring it to an abrupt end to get the visitor out of our way. When he had gone, I even remarked that he was a clever fellow to talk to. Rosette reminded me that only two months before I had found him a tedious before and the biggest fool on earth. To this I could make no reply, for I had indeed said so. And yet I think I was quite right, in spite of the apparent inconsistency; for on the former occasion he had broken into a charming conversation, while on the latter he had rescued an exhausted and languishing conversation (at least from my own point of view), and spared me, for that day, the wearisome acting of a love-scene. Such is the state of our affairs. The position is serious, specially when one of the party continues to be infatuated, clinging desperately to the remnants of the other's affection. I am really at a loss. Although I am not in love with Rosette, I cherish a great affection for her, and I would not dream of doing anything to hurt her feelings. I want her to go on believing that I love her.

Out of gratitude for all those magic hours which flew away so pleasantly in her company, out of gratitude for the love she has given me to requite her pleasure, I desire it. I will just deceive her; for is not a pleasant little act of betrayal better than a statement of a painful truth? And I shall never have the heart to tell her that I do not love her. The faint shadow of love on which she dotes seems so adorable and dear to her, she embraces the pale spectre with so much intoxicating effusion that I simply dare not to eliminate it. Yet I am afraid she will come to realize in the end that it is only phantom. This morning we had a talk, and to preserve its faithful accuracy, I am now reporting it in its dramatic



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form; it fills me with apprehension that I shall not be able to prolong our liaison much further. A sunbeam steals in through the curtains; it is ten o'clock. Rosette's arm is placed under my neck; she does not move it lest I should wake up. Now and again she raises herself a little on her elbow, and bends over my face while holding her breath. I see it all through the screen of my eyelashes, as I have been already awake for one hour. The night was riotous; Rosette's chemise has been torn; her disorderly hair is visible from her little bonnet. She looks as pretty as any woman whom one does not love any longer, though one has slept with her.

Seeing that I am awake, she is addressing me: "You, the naughty sleeper!" I yawn. Rosette remarks: "Do not yawn like that, or I will not kiss you for a week."—"Well!"—"It seems, Monsieur! that you are not very keen on my kisses."—"On the contrary."—"You say that in a perfunctory manner. Very well, Monsieur, rest assured that for a whole week my lips will not touch yours. To-day is Tuesday, so not till Tuesday week."—"Bah!"—"Why Bah?"—"Yes, Bah, you shall kiss me before this evening, or I will die."—"Will you die?—What a coxcomb you are! I have spoilt you, Monsieur!"—"I shall live. I am not a coxcomb, and you have not spoilt me at all, quite the reverse. I should first ask you to stop addressing me as 'Monsieur.' You know me long enough to call me by name."—"I have really spoilt you, I have really spoilt you, Albert."—"Good. Now bring your mouth closer."—"No, not till Tuesday next."—"Go on, shall we not embrace unless we have a calendar in hand? We are both too young for that. Now, your mouth, child! or I will get a stiff neck."—"No."—"Ah! You want me to get it by force, little one! Very well, it shall be so. The thing is feasible, though perhaps, it has not yet been attempted."—"You are impertinent."—"My pretty one! You

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should note that I was polite enough to add 'perhaps'—which is very honourable on my part. But we are straying away from our point. Lean towards me. Come. What is the matter my sweet Sultana? What a sour face you have now! I want to kiss a smile, not a pout."—Rosette replies as she leans forward to be kissed. "How can you expect me to smile; you tell such hard things to me."—"I meant to be tender. Why should I be unkind to you?"—"I do not know, but you are."—"You mistake my nonsense jokes for hard unpleasant remarks."—"Do you call that nonsense? Every trifle means so much in love. I would rather you beat me than crack such jokes."—"Do you prefer to see me cry?"—"You always go from one extreme to another. I have not asked you to cry, but only to talk sense, and to give up that bantering tone that ill becomes you."—"It is impossible for me to talk reasonably without chaffing. So, I shall beat you, since you prefer it"—"Do."—"I would rather", tapping her shoulder gently, I say; "cut off my head than spoil your lovely little body, and mar the fair whiteness of your lovely back. My goddess, whatever pleasure a woman may get in being beaten, it shall not fall to your lot."—"You do not love me any longer".—"That does not follow at all from what I just told you, it is as much logical as to say—it rains, so do not lend me your umbrella, or it is cold, so do open the window."—"You do not love me, you have never loved me"—"Ah, things are now getting complicated; 'You do not love me, you have never loved'—This sounds rather contradictory. How can I cease to do a thing I have never done before? You see, my little queen, you do not know what you are talking about, and all you say is perfectly absurd."

"I desired so much to be loved by you that I have only helped to delude myself. It is easy to believe what one desires to believe. But now I can clearly see that I am mistaken. You have deceived yourself too. You have acquired

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a taste for love, and a desire for passion. The same thing is repeated every day. I do not blame you for not having loved me. I am to blame myself for my lack of charms. I wish I were more beautiful, more sprightly, more coquettish. I ought to have tried to ascend to your level, my poet, instead of bringing you down to mine. I was afraid to lose you in the cloudland; and I feared your brain might steal your heart from me. I kept you a captive of my love, and I believed that by surrendering my all to you, I would make you retain something of it in yourself."

"Rosette, move a little; your flesh burns me, you are like a hot coal."

"If I bore you, I would rather go away. Ah! you have a heart of flint! Drops of water can wear out a rock, but my tears cannot penetrate you." She weeps.

"If you start crying, you will turn our bed into a bath, or to be more correct, an ocean. Can you swim, Rosette?"

"Scoundrel!"

"Well, now I am a scoundrel! But you flatter me, Rosette, I do not deserve that honour. I am only a blasé bourgeois, alas, I have never committed the smallest of crimes. I have perhaps done a silly thing by loving you to distraction, that is all. Do you ardently wish me to repent of my love? I have loved you, and I love you with all intensity. Since I have been your lover, I have always walked in your shadow. I have devoted all my time to you, my days, my evenings. I have not addressed purple phrases to you, because I prefer to use them only in writing. But I have given you a thousand tokens of love. I will not allude to my staunch fidelity, that is understood. And I have lost two pounds in weight since you chose to be my mistress. What more would you have of me? I am with you to-day, as I was yesterday, and shall be tomorrow. Is this what a man does with a woman whom he does not love? I do

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all you wish me to do. If you say—'Let us go,' and I part; and 'Let us stay,' and I remain. Methinks I am the most admirable lover in the world."

"That is precisely my complaint; in fact, you are the most perfect lover."

"Then, why do you reproach me?"

"There is no reason whatsoever. But I would much rather have something to complain of."

"This is really a strange quarrel."

"It is much worse. You do not love me. I cannot help it, neither can you. What could we do then? Certainly it would be better to have some fault to forgive you. Then I could scold you; you would put up some sort of excuses, and at last we should make it all up."—"That would be all to your advantage. For the greater the crime, the grander would the reparation be."—"You know very well, monsieur, that I am not yet reduced to that extremity; and that if I should wish even now, although you do not love me and we are quarrelling. . . ."—"Yes, I admit it is an act of clemency on your part. Then, spare me a little. That would be better than arguing in the way we are doing."

"Now you want to cut short a conversation which embarrasses you. But if you please, my friend, we will just go on talking."

"That will not be a very extravagant luxury. Be assured you are wrong. You are ravishingly beautiful, and for you I have feelings. . . ."—"Which you will express to me on a future occasion."

"Well, my adored one! Are you really a little Hyrcanian tigress? Your cruelty beats all record! Are you obsessed with the idea of becoming a vestal virgin? Such a caprice would be quite novel, I tell you."

"Why not? Stranger things have happened; but most certainly I will play the role of a vestal virgin, when you

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are concerned. You should understand, Monsieur, that I give myself only to those who love me, or whom I believe to be my love. You are not one of them. Permit me to leave you."

"If you get up, so will I. Then you will have the trouble of coming back to bed, that's all."

"Let me go!"

"Certainly not!"

Rosette struggling:

"Will you leave me?"

"Madam, I assure you, I will not."

Rosette finding that she is not stronger:

"Very well, I stay! You are hurting my arm! What do you want?"

"I daresay, Madam, you know it already. I never allow myself to say what I allow myself to do. I have enough sense of decency!"

Rosette, unable to resist:

"On condition that you shall love me very much . . . I surrender."

"It is little too late to capitulate when the enemy has 'ready captured the citadel."

Rosette, throwing her arms around my neck, almost fainting:

"Without any condition . . . I recommend myself to your mercy."

"Quite so."

Here, my friend, I think it will be not out of place to conclude the dialogue, as the rest can hardly be reported.

Meanwhile, the brilliant sunbeam was dancing round in our room; a fragrant aroma from the lime trees was pouring in, the weather was beautiful; the sky is blue like the eyes of an English girl. We got up, and after a hearty breakfast

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went out for a long walk in the country. The limpidity of the air, the splendour of the countryside, and the aspect of gay, joyful nature implanted into my soul more tenderness and sentimentality; and it did not take Rosette long to be convinced that after all I possessed a heart just like other men.

Have you ever noticed how the shade of the woods, the murmur of the waterfalls, the song of the birds, and the smell of leaves and of flowers—all the elements of pastoral poetry, of which it is so conventional to make fun, do exert over us, however depraved we may be, an occult power which is almost irresistible? I will confide to you, under a vow of the greatest secrecy, that I surprised myself quite recently by betraying the most provincial emotion over the song of a nightingale. It was in a garden; the sky though it was night, had a clearness almost similar to that of the brightest day. It was so profound and transparent that one's gaze could easily penetrate upwards to God. One could seem to see the folds of the angels' robes fluttering on the white curves of the road to Saint Jacques. The moon was up; but a tall tree hid it entirely. It riddled the black foliage with a million tiny luminous holes, making it more sparkling than any spangled fan of a Marquise. A silence, broken by noises and stifled sighs, prevailed over the garden. Although I could see only the blue light of the moon, I seem to be surrounded by a vast crowd of unknown but sympathetic phantoms and I did not feel lonely, though there was no one else on the terrace. I was not thinking nor dreaming. I was hypnotized by the nature all around me. I feel myself rustle with the leaves, shimmer with the water, shine with the moonbeam, and blossom with the flowers. I was no more than the tree, the water and the beauty of the night. I was all that, and I do not think it possible to be further from myself than I was at that moment. Suddenly, as if something extraordinary were going to happen, the leaves stopped

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falling off the branches, the drops of water from the fountain remained suspended in the air. The silver rays of the moon ceased to shine. My heart alone was beating so loud that it seemed to fill that vast space with sound. Then my heart ceased to throb, and there reigned such a profound silence in the midst of which one could hear the grass grow and could listen to a whisper two hundred leagues away. Instantly, the nightingale, probably awaiting such a moment to commence his song, drew forth from his little throat a note so clear and eloquent that I heard it in my breast as well as in my ears. The music suddenly filled the crystal, soundless sky and created in it a harmonious atmosphere in which the other note as they followed hovered as if upon wings. I comprehended as perfectly what he was singing as though I had mastered the secret of the birds' language. It was the tale of loves I have missed. Never was a story more exact or truthful. He did not omit the trifling detail or the most imperceptible nuance. He told me what I had not been able to tell myself; he explained to me what I never could understand; he gave a voice to my reverie, and extracted an answer from the phantom which had been mute until then. I knew that I was loved, and his most languorous roulade told me that I should be soon happy. I seemed to see through the trills of the song and under the rain of notes, that were spreading out in the moonbeam, the white arms of my beloved outstretched towards me. She was slow in rising into vision, bathed with the perfume from the heart of hundred roses. I will not try to describe her beauty; words fail to picture it. How can I express what is inexpressible? How can I paint what has neither form nor colour, or how can I note a voice that has no tone or words? Never before had I so much love in my heart! I could have clasped nature to my breast. I pressed the void between my arms as if it were the waist of a virgin. I blew kisses to the air that

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was brushing my lips. I was swimming in the ether issuing from my radiant body. Ah! if Rosette had been here, how happy I should have been. But women never appear at the right moment. The nightingale ceased to sing; the moon, overcome by drowsiness, drew over its eyes a film of clouds, and I left the garden, for the chill of the evening had begun to affect me. As I was feeling cold, it naturally occurred to me that I should get warmer in Rosette's bed. So I went to her. I let myself in with my latch-key, as all were asleep inside. Even Rosette was sleeping, and I was rather glad to find that it was a volume of my poems that she lay on. Her arms were folded above her head; her mouth was half open and smiling, one of her legs was straight and the other slightly bent, in a posture of graceful abandon. She looked so alluring that I mortally regretted not to have fallen in love with her.

While glancing at her, it dawned on me that I was really stupid as an ostrich. I now possessed what I had so long desired, a mistress who was as much my own as my horse and my sword, young, pretty, loving and lively. And she had no overscrupulous mother, no authoritative father, no pugnacious brother, no cantankerous aunt. Moreover she had the pleasant advantage of a husband duly deceased, nailed and sealed inside a lead-lined, oak coffin which was covered with a heavy marble. A mistress, free as the air of the mountain, who is ready to indulge in the most exquisite refinements of elegant love, having no morality of any kind, never alluding to her virtues not to her reputation as if she had never any, disdaining her own sex as much as if she had been a man; boldly showing her aversion to platonic love, while allowing her heart to participate in the game of love. A woman who, under different circumstances, would have no doubt become the most admirable courtesan in the world, and would have outshone Aspasia and Imperial!



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And such a woman belonged to me! I could mould her into any shape I would fancy. I had the key of her room and drawer, I opened her letters, I had changed her former name and gave her a new one. She was my own thing, my own property. Her youth, beauty, love, all belonged to me. I could use and abuse it all, I would make her sleep in the day and keep awake at night, according to my caprices. And she simply obeyed without any pose of a martyr or without putting on the airs of a resigned victim. She was affectionate, caressing and faithful. I should think that if six months ago, at a time when I was dolefully yearning for a mistress, someone could make me foresee such a happiness in the distant future, I would have run mad with joy and would, out of sheer delight, have thrown off my hat in the air. Well, now that this happiness is mine, it leaves me cold. I am hardly impressed by it, and I doubt of any change having come over me. Should I leave Rosette I am convinced that within a month or so I will have so totally forgotten her existence that I will not even feel whether I knew her ever. Will she act the same towards me? I do not believe it.

I was then reflecting on this theme, and as I was in a repentant mood, I imprinted on the fair sleeper the most chaste and melancholy kiss that a man has ever given a woman at midnight. She made a slight stir, her face brightened a little, but she did not wake up. I slowly undressed and straightened myself out between the sheets like a snake. The touch of my cool body startled her; she opened her eyes, and without a word, pressed her lips to mine. She entwined my body into hers so closely that I was warmed up in an instant. All the lyricism of the evening ended in prose, but it was a poetic prose. That night was the most delightful I ever spent, and I cannot reasonably expect its repetition.

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My mistress and myself have still some very pleasant moments, but they have to be improvised by the aid of extraneous circumstances. But at the outset I had no need to excite my imagination by raving at the moon or at the nightingale to enjoy all the pleasures possible to a man not really in love. Now, there are some knots in our web here and there, but the thread may be still unbroken. The wrap is, however, no longer smooth.

Rosette who is still in love does her best to remove these disadvantages. Unfortunately there are two things in the world which cannot be ordered about—love and ennui. On my part I make superhuman efforts to overcome the languor which gets its hold on me and like the provincial folk who begin to doze at ten o'clock in the evening in a fashionable drawing-room, I try to keep my eyes as wide open as possible by raising my eyelids with my fingers. But it is of no avail and I am sinking gradually into ennui and indifference.

My dear child who feels better in rural surroundings, took me to the country yesterday.

I should better give you a description of that countryside which is quite pretty in its own way. It will also enliven a little all my metaphysics. And besides I need a background for the persons in question, as figures cannot stand out from a void or from that vague brown tint with which painters fill up their canvass. The approaches to it are very picturesque. Along a high road, bordered with trees, a spot is reached where several paths meet, and here stands a stone obelisk surmounted by a bowl of gilded copper. Five paths converge; then there is a sudden declivity in the ground. The high road plunges down into a narrow valley where there is a stream which it crosses by means of a single-arch bridge; then it ascends steeply on to the other slope where a village is situated; the steeple of its church can be seen peeping between the thatched roofs and

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the rounded tops of the apple trees. The horizon is not vast, as it is bounded on two sides by the crest of the hillocks; but it is pleasant and restful to the eye. By the side of the bridge there is a mill, and a red sandstone building in the shape of a tower. The presence of a few hounds incessantly barking and warming themselves in the sun would inform you that this is the dwelling of the game-keeper; if the buzzards and weasels nailed to the shutters could leave any doubt on this point. Here an avenue of mountain ashes begins, the scarlet berries of which attract the birds. As it is generally unfrequented, there is a white track in the middle of the road, all the rest is covered with a short, fine moss; and in the double cart-track little frogs as green as lizards croak and jump. A little farther up there is an iron gate, which was once gilded and painted, and the sides of which are furnished with spiked railings. Then the road winds towards the chateau which is not yet visible, as it lies hidden away in the foliage like a birds' nest. You can meander through this avenue to stop at a stream or a fountain, an elegant pavilion or a broad vista, and you cross and recross the river on many quaint rustic bridges. The rocky nature of the ground and the dams made for the mill have created many waterfalls, four or five feet high; and nothing is more pleasant than to hear the murmuring cascades around you, which remain very often out of your sight, as the rushes and osiers form an almost impenetrable screen. But all this part of the park in some respect forms an ante-chamber to the rest. A high road which traverses the estate unfortunately cuts it in two; but this drawback has been remedied in an ingenious way. Two high walls with battlements full of barbicans and loopholes in imitation of a ruined fortress, stand on either side of the road. A tower to which giant ivy clings on the side of the chateau drops with iron chains upon the bastion opposite a real draw-

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bridge; and this bridge is let down every morning. Through a beautiful archway, one can pass into the interior of the dungeon; and thence into the second enclosure where the trees, which have not been cut for a century, are of enormous height, and having their gnarled trunks covered with parasite plants, are the strangest and finest I have ever seen. - Some have leaves only at the tops, which are umbrella-shaped; others are slender like plumes; others, on the contrary, have not far from their roots a large clump from which the bare trunk shoots up to the sky like a second tree planted on the first. Such a curious deformity do they display that they seem like the drawings of an artificial landscape or theatrical scenery. The ivy which trails from one tree to another mingles its dark foliage with the green leave of trees of which it seems to be the shadow. Nothing in the world looks more picturesque. The river widens out at this spot to form a small lake, and its shallowness makes visible through the transparent water the beautiful aquatic plants which carpet its bed. There are nymphae and water-lilies swimming nonchalantly in the pure crystal with the reflections of clouds and of weeping willows looming over the stream. The chateau is on the other side, and a little boat will spare you with the trouble of making a long detour to find the bridge. It is an assembly of buildings erected at varying periods, with irregular gables and a number of small turrets and pavilion is quite modern; it has a flat Italian roof with vases, and tiled balustrade and a canvas-covered vestibule like a tent; the windows are all different in size, and they do not correspond with one another; even trefoils can be seen there, as the chapel is of Gothic style. Honey-suckle, jasmine and vine creep up the walls, and their twigs enter familiarly into the rooms, and seem to stretch out their hands with the greetings of the morning. In spite of a lack of regula-

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rity or rather because of it, the appearance of the building is charming. At least it cannot all be seen at a single glance. There is plenty of choice, and always something fresh to notice. This mansion, which I did not know before as it is twenty leagues away, instantly captured my fancy, and I realized at once Rosette's perfect taste, and her triumphant idea in selecting such a nest for our amours.

We reached there at nightfall, and as we were tired after a hearty dinner we had nothing better to do than to retire to bed, and we wanted to have a good night's rest.

My rosy dreams were full of flowers, perfumes and birds, when I felt a warm breath on my forehead and a kiss descend on my lips. The sound of the kiss and a sweet moisture on my lips made me discover that it was not an illusion. I opened my eyes, and the first thing I saw was Rosette's fresh white neck as she leant over the bed to embrace me: I threw my arms around her waist, and kissed her more lovingly than I had done for a long time. She drew back the curtain and opened the window, and then seated herself on the edge of my bed, holding my hand between hers and playing with my rings. She was not wearing any corset or petticoat, and she had absolutely nothing on except a milk-white dressing-gown slightly plaited. Her hair was drawn upwards to the top of her head, and there was a little white rose which had only two or three leaves. Her ivory feet were encased in slippers of bright colour, tiny but still too large for her, and without heels like those worn by the young Roman ladies. Her dress which was most coquettish in its simplicity made me regret that I was already her lover and had not still to become so.

The dream I had at the moment when she awakened me in such an agreeable fashion was not far removed from reality. My room opened out on the little lake I have

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described just now. Jasmine encircled my window, and shed its blossoms in a silvery shower upon my floor. Large orchids bloomed on my balcony, as if to compliment me. A sweet, faint perfume, composed of a thousand different scents, pervades the room; and I could see outside million drops of water shimmer and sparkle. Birds were singing and warbling; it was a harmony of confused sounds like the noise at a fair. Facing me, on the hill-side illuminated by the sun, a golden green meadow stretched itself, where a few oxen grazed here and there under the charge of a small boy. Higher up and farther away were visible immense patches of woods of a darker green, from which mounted in spirals the blue smoke of charcoal-kilns.

The entire landscape was calm, and fresh and smiling; and wherever I turned my eyes, everything looked young and beautiful. My room had Persian tapestry and mats on the floor; while blue Japanese vases, large in the body with slender necks, were artistically arranged upon the shelves and on the marble mantelpiece. There were pictures, too, representing pastoral and rural scenes, of gay colours and of graceful design; there were sofas and couches in every colour. Then, last of all, there was a young and lovely woman, all in white, whose flesh delicately tinted her transparent garment wherever it touched her. Nothing more conducive could be imagined to the pleasure of the soul and of the senses. So, my delighted glance travelled with equal pleasure from a magnificent vase, decorated with dragons and mandarins, to Rosette's slippers, and from there to the corner of her shoulder shining beneath the cambric; it rested upon the trembling blossoms of the jasmine and the willows on the river-bank, passed over the water and explored the hillside, and then returned to the room to fix itself upon the rose-tinted bows on the corset of shepherdess. Through the gaps in the foliage the sky displayed

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innumerable blue peaks. The water murmured gently and I gave myself up completely to a silent appreciation of all this joy, steeped in a tranquil ecstasy—with my hands still clasped in Rosette's.

The saying that happiness is red or white is a happy expression. It can hardly be represented by other colours. Soft colours suit it eminently. There are only upon my palette a water-green, sky-blue and a straw-coloured yellow. Its pictures are all in the light like those of Chinese painters. Flowers, mild perfumes, a soft, silky skin brushing your own veiled harmony emanating from an unknown spot—all these provide the best materials for perfect happiness. And there is no other way of attaining happiness. I who loathe the commonplace, who dream of nothing but strange adventures, violent passions, delirious ecstasies, difficult and unconventional situations, have become supremely happy through this way; and in spite of all my efforts, I have been unable to find any other.

I should beg you to believe that these reflexions did not come to my mind then; afterwards, while writing to you they have come into my head. At that moment I was entirely wrapped up in my enjoyment—the only occupation of a sensitive person.

I shall not describe to you the life we lead here; you can easily imagine it.

There are rambles in the woods amidst violets and wild strawberries, kisses and little blue flowers, picnics on the grass, reading and books forgotten under the trees, rowing on the water with a white hand or a scarf trailing in the stream, much singing, and echoes of loud laughter. Ours is the most Arcadian life it is possible to imagine.

Rosette is overwhelming me with caresses and attentions, anticipating all my desires. She is more loving than a cooing dove in the month of May. She winds herself round

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me, and entwines me in her folds; she tries to prevent me breathing any other atmosphere than her breath or seeing any other horizon than her eyes. She holds me in a powerful siege; and she is so exacting that she allows nothing to enter or leave without her permission. She has built a little tower by the side of my heart from which she watches day and night. She talks to me with the most alluring charm; she composes passionate madrigals for me; she sits upon my knee, and behaves like a humble slave in the presence of her lord and master. All this pleases me, for I love such submissive attitude, as I have always a leaning towards oriental despotism. She does not take any step without asking my advice, and seems to have made a total surrender of her own will and inclinations. She tries to guess my thoughts and anticipate them. Her tenderness and complacency are so extraordinary that sometimes I get wearied. She is veritably perfection personified. How shall I be able to leave such an adorable woman without playing the part of a monster? It would always stand as a glaring discredit to my heart.

Oh! How I do long to find her at fault, or to unearth something wrong in her! How impatiently do I wait for a chance to quarrel! But there is scarcely any fear of the devil giving me one! When, to provoke an altercation, I blurt out to her harshly, she answers in such gentle tones, with such a silvery voice, with eyes so moist, with an air so sad and loving, that I appear to myself more like a tiger or a crocodile; and though in a rage, I am constrained to beg her pardon. Literally she is just killing me with love. Daily she is torturing me and tightening more rigorously the vice in which she has squeezed me. Probably she means to goad me to declare that I simply loathe her, that she bores me to death and if she does not leave me alone, I will cut her face with my horse-whip. By god! she would pretty well drive



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me soon to such straits, if she continues to behave in the like fashion.

In spite of all this charming facade, Rosette is surfeited of me as I am of her. But as she has committed some blatant follies for my sake, she does not want to be judged wrongly by the honourable assembly of sensible women, when we break off. Every grand passion pretends to be eternal, and it is convenient to reap the benefit of this eternity without having to endure its discomforts. Rosette must have reasoned within herself thus: "Here is a young man who has only a little love left for me; and as he is naive and debonair, he does not dare to let me see it, and does not know how to forge the necessary weapon. It is obvious that he is bored by me, but he would rather die than take it upon himself to leave me as he has something of a poet in him; his head is full of beautiful phrases of love and passion, and therefore believe himself to be under an obligation to play the part of a Tristan or an Amadis. As nothing in the world is more intolerable than the caresses of a woman for whom one's love has ceased (and to cease to love a woman is to hate her violently), I must lavish my favours upon him so as to satiate him in every respect or force him either to dismiss me or to resume his former ardours towards me; and the latter he will be careful not to do."

Nothing could be better planned. Is it not charming to play the role of the forsaken Ariadne? She will excite universal pity and admiration, while the bitterest invective would be exhausted on the wretch who has been monstrous enough to abandon such an adorable creature. The lady assumes a mournful and resigned air; places her hand beneath her chin and her elbow on her knee so as to display the pretty blue veins on her wrist.

Her hair is done up in a subdued fashion, and for a time she wears dress of a darker shade. She studiously avoids

uttering the name of the unfaithful wretch, but alludes to him in a round-about way with admirably modulated sighs.

A woman so good, so lovely and so passionate, who has made such great sacrifices, who is absolutely above reproach, a pearl of love, a spotless mirror, a drop of pure milk, a white rose, an ideal essence to perfume a man's life—a woman who ought to be worshipped on bended knees and, after death, should be cut up into small pieces as holy relics! How can a man desert such a being so basely, so iniquitously and so treacherously! A pirate could not act more abominably! It is like striking her a death-blow; for she will most certainly die of it. A man must have a cobble-stone instead of a heart to behave in such a way.

O men! Men!

I say to myself: "But perhaps it is not true." Grand comediennes though women are by nature, I can hardly believe them to reach such heights! And, after all, are not Rosette's demonstrations the exact expression of her real sentiments towards me? Whatever the case may be, it is no longer possible to continue our intimate conversations; and the beautiful Lady of the Moor has just issued invitations to her acquaintances of the neighbourhood. We are now busy making preparations for entertaining these worthy country-folk. Good-bye, dear old friend.

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I was mistaken. My wicked heart, incapable of love, imagined that reason to free itself from the dead weight of a gratitude it did not wish to bear. I had gladly seized upon that idea to excuse myself in my eyes. I clung to it, but nothing in the world was more false. Rosette was not play-acting, and if ever a woman was true and sincere, she is that one. Ah well! The very sincerity of her passion worries me, for it is one more tie, and renders a rupture even more difficult and less excusable. I would prefer she were false

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and flighty. What a peculiarly odd mess I am in! I should like to leave her, yet I stay; I should like to say: "I hate you," but I declare instead "I love you." My past pushes me onward, precluding any halt or retreat. I am faithful, but I regret to be so. I do not know what sort of shame prevents me from having another love-affair, and makes me compromise with myself. I give her what I could not give another without losing face. The time and the opportunity of meeting, which formerly were managed so easily, now only occur with difficulty. I begin to remember that I have important business to attend to. Such a situation is, no doubt, complicated by painful searchings of heart, but it is not as bad as the one I am in. When a new affair attracts one away from the old, it is easier to make oneself free. Hope smiles on the man from the threshold of the house where dwell your new love. An illusion, fairer and more rosy hover with white wings over the barely closed tomb of its defunct sister. Another flower, more fragrant and more lovely on which trembles a heavenly tear-drop, has suddenly blossomed forth from among the dead petals of the old bouquet. Beautiful, blue perspectives open out before you; discreet and charming avenues stretch away to the horizon. Here are gardens with pale statues, and bench leaning against an ivy covered wall, meadows spangled with daisies, narrow balconies on which people rest their arms while gazing at the moon, shaded nooks intersected by furtive lights, drawing rooms with heavy curtains shutting out the light of day all the darkness and isolation sought by the love which dares not to expose itself is there. It is like second youth coming over to you. There is something else besides the change of places, habits and persons: there is also a feeling of remorse. But the desire which hovers around your head like a bee in the spring time, prevents its voice from being heard. The void in your heart is filled, and memories are effaced by new

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impressions. But in this case it is not the same thing. I love nobody and it is only through sheer ennui that I wish to break with Rosette.

My old ideas, which had remained dormant, have become more pronounced than before. I am again tormented with a desire to possess a mistress and as formerly, even in Rosette's arms I doubt I have found one, I visualize again the grand dame at her window in her Louis XIII park, and the fair huntress on her white horse galloping through the forest. My ideal beauty smiles on me from the clouds; I think I can recognize her voice in the music of the birds and in the rustling of the leaves. It seems that I am hailed from all sides, and the daughters of the air brush my cheeks with the fringes of their invisible scarves. Just as in those days of my intense mental agitation, I imagine that if I set off at once and go somewhere far away in great speed, I should reach a spot where events are shaping themselves, which concern me intimately, and where my destiny is being decided. I feel that some one is awaiting for me impatiently in some obscure corner of the globe, I know not where. A soul in torment is calling me eagerly, and is dreaming of me, as she is unable to approach me. This has made me very uneasy of mind, and I cannot stay where I am. I am violently attracted outside my centre. My nature is not one of those which lead others, one of those fixed stars around which other lights gravitate. I must have to wander through the firmament like an unstable meteor till I meet the planet whose satellite I am destined to be, the Saturn to whom I am to offer my ring. Oh, when will this hymen be celebrated? Till then I cannot hope for respite or a proper equilibrium; and I will have to remain like a distracted needle of a compass searching for its pole.

I thought I could extricate myself from this treacherous slime, with the loss of but one feather or two, and I hoped

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I could get free whenever I would like. But nothing could be more difficult; I find myself entangled in the coils of an imperceptible net, which is harder to break than the one forged by Vulcan; and its meshes are so strong that there is practically no loophole for escape. The net is, moreover wide enough for me to move about within with what appears to be perfect freedom. It is hardly noticeable till I try to break it; but then it resists and becomes as solid as a wall of bronze.

How much time I have wasted, O my ideal! Without making the necessary effort to realize you. How have I accepted my ephemeral pleasures like an arrant coward! And how little do I deserve to meet you.

Sometimes I think of forming another liaison, but I have nobody in view. More often do I propose—if ever I should succeed in breaking my bonds—not to allow myself to be entangled again in such ties. Yet such a resolution is unjustified, as this affair of mine has, to all appearances, been quite happy, and I have not the slightest complaint to make against Rosette. She has always been very good to me and no one could have behaved better. Her fidelity has been exemplary, and it could never give rise to any suspicion. The most wide-awake and suspicious jealousy could never find anything to point against her. A lover could, however have been jealous in respect of past affairs; it is true he would have found every ground for being so. But jealousy of such a kind is a delicacy, fortunately very rare. The present fills one's time so much that it would be futile to search among the debris of old passions for poison phials and cups of bitterness. What woman a man could ever love, if he thought of all that? A man may know that woman has had several lovers, but man's pride is so peculiar that he prefers imagining that he is the first she has really loved: and it was only through the conjunction of evil circum-

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tances that she became entangled with persons unworthy of her, or else it was due to the vague desire of a heart which sought to satisfy itself and which changed only because the desire was not realized.

Perhaps it is only possible to love a virgin in the most approved style—a virgin both in body and mind, a frail, tender bud which has not been even caressed by any zephyr, and whose locked breast has not felt the coolness of dew or rainwater—a chaste flower which has disrobed herself to none but to yourself—a beautiful lily with a silver bell where no desire has ever dwelt, which has been gilded only by your own sun, swayed by one breath alone, and watered solely by your hand. The dazzling brilliance of midday is not so captivating as the divine pallor of the dawn; and all the ardour of an experienced soul which has seen life, yields in quality to the celestial innocence of a young heart that is just awakening to love. Ah, how bitterly shameful is the feeling that one is wiping another man's kisses; that there is perhaps, no single spot on that brow, on these lips, on those breasts, and on those shoulders, upon the whole of that body, which has not been stained by the lips of others; that those divine babbles which come to the tongue's aid when words fail, have already reached others' ears; that those deeply stirred senses have already received from another their ecstasy and delirium; and that far away in a very remote recess of that soul, an inexorable memory watches and compares the pleasures of to-day with those of the past. Although my natural propensity leads me to prefer high roads to untrodden tracks, the popular drinking-pool to the fresh and unfamiliar mountain spring, I must try my utmost to fall in love with some virgin maiden, spotlessly white as snow, tremulous as a highly sensitive plant, always bashful and blushing. Perhaps from this limpid stream into which no diver has ever descended, I may unearth a most rare pearl, which can well

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match with Cleopatra's gem. But to accomplish this I must have to break off the bond which attaches me to Rosette, as it is probably not with her that I could realize this desire; and truly I do not feel to have the requisite strength to do it.

Then too, if I must admit it, there is in my mind a secret and shameful motive which dares not to be seen in broad day-light—but I must disclose it to you, since I have promised not to conceal anything from you and also because a confession worth its name must be complete. This motive contributes a great deal to my present uncertainty. If I break with Rosette some interval must necessarily elapse before I can replace her, however indulgent those women may be among whom I shall seek for a successor. And I have acquired from my association with Rosette a habit of pleasure which it will be very painful for me to suspend. It is true that there are in the last resort the courtesans whom I used to frequent formerly. But now-a-days they disgust me horribly; they are really nauseating. So, we must not consider them at all. I am now so much enervated by pleasures and the poison has so deeply entered into my bone that I simply cannot bear the separation from a mistress even for one or two months. This is rank selfishness of the worst sort. But I think, the most virtuous, if they care to be truthful, would confess to things of a similar nature.

That is the strongest tie of all, and were it not for this reason Rosette and myself would have parted long ago. Moreover it is such a tedious task to court a woman that I have now not the least inclination for it. To begin over again all the charming nonsense that I have already uttered so often; to compose love letters and to answer them; to escort the belle home in the evening, miles away from your own dwelling; to get cold feet for keeping a long vigil at a window for your beloved: to calculate, while lying in bed, how many overlying tissues separate you from your goddess;

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to carry flower bouquets and to attend the balls—all this labour has to be undergone only to reach the position you are in now. Is it really worth taking such trouble? I may as well remain in my groove; if to get out of it is to just fall into another, which is exactly similar to the former, then why bother? If I were in love, this long process would all seem natural, and charming too. But I am not in that state, though I desire so much to be. After all, love is the only precious thing in this world; and if pleasure, which is but its shadow has so much allurements for us, then what must the reality be? In what ocean of ineffable ecstasies, in lake of pure delights must those swim, who have been struck by one of the golden darts of love and burn with the flaming ardours of passion!

I feel in Rosette's company that impassive calm, and that sensation of lazy well-being which are produced by satiation of sensual pleasure; but nothing more, and it is enough. Often this voluptuous numbness degenerates into a torpor, and the tranquillity into ennui. I then drift into meaningless distractions and insipid dreams which only tend to fatigue me. It is a state from which I must emerge at any cost.

Oh! Could I be like those friends of mine who kiss an old glove with rapture, who find happiness in a handshake, who would refuse to exchange for a Sultana's treasures a handful of faded flowers half-dried by the heat of a dance-hall, who shed tears over a stupid and commonplace love-note and sews it up into their shirt near their heart, who adore women with large, ugly feet and who excuse themselves by declaring that their beloved ones have beautiful souls! If I could follow with a thrill of excitement the last folds of a skirt, wait for a door to open in order to see the fairy passing out in a flood of light; if a whispering voice made me blush; if I had the necessary enthusiasm to forego



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my dinner with a view to attend a rendezvous in time, if I were capable of stabbing a rival or of fighting a duel with a husband; if, through Heaven's special grace, I could discover spirituality in ugly women, and cleverness in the silly ones; if I could decide to dance the minuet and listen to the sonatas played by young people on the *clavecin*\* or the harp; and finally if I were a normal man and not a poet, I should be much happier than I am, I should be less bored and be less boring to others.

I have never demanded of women anything else than beauty, I can very well do without the soul and mind. To me a woman who is beautiful is always clever. She has the wit to be beautiful, and I do not know anything better. It would require many a brilliant phrase and a scintillating wit to match one lightning glance from a beautiful eye. I prefer a pretty mouth to a well-turned phrase, a finely-modelled shoulder to any virtue, even a theological virtue. I would give fifty souls for a tiny foot, and all the poesy and the poets for the hand of Jeanne d'Aragon or the brow of the virgin of Foligno. I adore above all things the beauty of form. Beauty to me is Divinity visible, a palpable happiness; it is heaven come down to earth.

In the undulating contours, in the beautiful lips, in the eyelids, and in the inclinations of the pretty head, there lies an indefinable charm which delights my senses beyond all description and keep me captivated for hours.

Beauty, the only thing which cannot be acquired, inaccessible, to those who have not been gifted with from birth; an ephemeral and fragile flower that grows without seeds, a pure gift from Heaven! O Beauty! the most radiant diadem with which destiny can crown a brow, you are admirable and precious like all that is beyond the reach of man, like the azure of the firmament, like the gold of a star, like the

\* Harpischord.

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perfume of the seraphic lily. One may exchange his tools for a throne; he may conquer the world—many have done it; but who would not kneel down before you, pure personification of the thought of God?

I only ask for beauty, it is true. But I must have it in such a perfect state that probably I shall never encounter it. I have seen occasionally in a few women some features admirably well-shaped while the others are not; and I have loved them for their special beauties, ignoring the rest. It is, however, a painful and grievous task to suppress one half of a mistress, and make a mental amputation of all that is ugly or plain in her, by concentrating the eyes solely upon her beautiful features. Beauty is harmony, and a person perfectly ugly is often less disagreeable a sight than a woman who is beautiful only in patches. Nothing gives me so much pain as the sight of an unfinished masterpiece or an imperfect beauty. An oil-stain is less shocking on a coarse linen than on rich brocade.

Rosette is by no means ugly. She may even pass as a beauty, but she is far from my ideal beauty of dreams. She is like a statue, several parts of which are very well carved; the others are not so striking; some parts are finely modelled with much skill and charm, while the rest is done in a loose, careless way. To the untrained eyes of the vulgar, this statue appears to be a finished work of beauty; but a careful observer soon finds out some spots where the chiselling is not precise, and some contours which, to attain their proper purity of form, need the passing and repassing of the sculptor's fingers many a time. It is for the lover to polish this marble and give the finishing touch; but I must say that I am not the man to do it. Besides, I do not circumscribe beauty within any particular sinuosity of lines. For me, general demeanour, gestures, walk, breath, colour, sound, perfume, in fact all that makes up life, enters into the compo-

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sition of beauty; everything which is fragrant, musical or luminous, rightfully belongs to it. I love rich brocades, splendid clothes with their ample folds; I love large flowers and their fragrance, the running brooks with transparent water, beautiful weapons with their shining glitter, thoroughbred horses, and big white dogs as we see in the pictures of Paul Veronese. I am a real Pagan in this respect, and I do not worship the gods who are badly represented. Although not exactly irreligious, none is, in fact, a worse Christian than I am. I fail to understand the mortification of flesh which constitutes the essence of Christianity: I consider it a sacrilege to do any injury to God's handiwork, and I cannot believe that the flesh is evil since He has fashioned it with His own hands in His own image. I have scant regard for the long, black garments of the religious order, from which only the head and two hands emerge and for those pictures in which everything is buried in shadow except a shining forehead. I want the sun to enter everywhere so that there may be a maximum of light with the least possible shadow. I love the sparkling play of colours, waving lines, bold display of nudity. Let not matter hide its own existence, since like the mind, it is an eternal hymn in adoration of God.

I can understand perfectly the extraordinary enthusiasm of the Greeks for beauty. I on my part see nothing absurd in the procedure which obliged the judges to hear the advocates pleading in the dark, for fear that their handsome appearance, their graceful gestures and attitudes might prejudice the judges in their favour, and bias their judgment.

I would never buy anything from an ugly shopkeeper. I give more freely to beggars whose rags of poverty are picturesque. There is a little Italian, smart and agile as a citron, with two big black and white eyes which cover half of his face; he might have come from a frameless picture by Murillo or Espagnoles exhibited in a secondhand dealer's

shop. He always receives from me a penny more than the others. I could never beat a fine horse or a beautiful dog, and I would never have a friend or a servant who has no good looks. Sight of an ugly person or an unattractive thing is a real torture to me. A building badly designed or an ill-shaped piece of furniture makes a house disagreeable to me, however comfortable and attractive it may be in other respects. The best champagne in a misshapen glass seems to lose all its worth. I must confess I would prefer the most Lacadæmonian broth in a china plate to a most delicious dish served in an earthenware platter. I have been always influenced by external appearances, and that is why I avoid usually the company of the aged; their wrinkles and deformities leave a very sad and disagreeable impression on me, though some of them have a special charm of their own.

In the pity which I feel for them is a strong admixture of disgust. Of all the ruins in the world the human wreckage is certainly the saddest to contemplate.

If I were a painter (and I always regret that I am not) I would only people my canvas with goddesses, nymphs, Madonnas, cherubs and Cupids. To devote one's brush to the painting of portraits, unless they are of good-looking people appears to me to be a crime against art. Far from copying ugly or ignoble faces, vulgar or insignificant heads, I would prefer to behead the originals. The ferocity of a Caligula, diverted in this direction, would appear to me very much laudable.

The only thing in the world I have ever envied is to be beautiful. I mean the beauty of a Paris or an Apollo. Absence of any deformity, possession of somewhat regular features—that is to say, with a nose in the centre of the face, neither flat nor crooked, eyes neither red nor blood-shot, and a mouth of proper size—these only do not constitute beauty. If it were so, I should myself be counted as beautiful; and

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yet I find myself as far from my ideal of manly beauty as if I were one of those grim figures that strike the hours on steeple clocks; and I should have a mountain upon each shoulder, the twisted legs of a dachshund, and the nose and muzzle of the monkey I should so much resemble. Many a time have I looked at myself in a mirror for hours with my attention fixed with an almost impossible glare, to find if there has been any improvement in my face. I wait to see the lines straighten or curve themselves with more delicate purity, my eyes become more bright and lively, and my profile to take on the serene simplicity of a classical Greek; and I am surprised when all this does not happen to me. I am hoping that in spring time I shall cast off my present appearance as a snake sheds its old skin. To think that so little is needed to make me handsome, and yet I never shall be! What! a little change, a little less flesh on this bone, or a little more somewhere, this small detail a painter or a sculptor would have set right in half-an-hour. What difference would it make to the atoms composing my body, if they were crystallized in some other way? What difference would it make to a contour if it were altered? What does it matter whether I am otherwise and not what I am. Really, if I could hold the Fates by the throat I should show no mercy. Because it pleased a miserable particle of something to fall somewhere and coagulate in a clumsy fashion into the ugly face I possess now, I shall have to be eternally unhappy! Is it not the most foolish and miserable fate in the world?

How is it that my soul with all its ardent and consuming desire, cannot drop the poor carrion that it keeps alive, and animate one of those statues whose exquisite beauty saddens and enchants it. There are two or three persons whom I would gladly murder, taking necessary care not to disfigure them, if I possessed the magic secret of transferring a soul

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from one body to the other. I have always thought that I need a perfect beauty to do what I want (though I do not know what I want), and I imagine that if I had it, my life which is so full of worries and complications, would have been complete.

There are so many beautiful frames to be seen on pictures! Why should not one of them be mine? There are so many charming heads which disappear beneath the dust and smoke of time in the old galleries! Would it not be better if they leave their frames and come to rest on my shoulders! Would Raphael's reputation suffer very much if one of the angels whom he sends flying in swarms in the ultramarine of his canvases gave up to me his mask for thirty years! There are so many places where his fresco have been worn out by the weight of years: nobody would care. What are those silent beauties doing on the walls? Why has not God or Destiny had the wit to do what man has done with a few hairs on a stick and some plaster of different colours mixed on a board?

My first sensation in presence of one of those beautiful heads whose painted gaze seems to penetrate through you into the Infinite, is a feeling of admiration not unmixed with terror. My eyes become moist, my heart beats; then, when I get a little familiarized with the picture, and have entered more deeply into the secret of its beauty, I tacitly compare it to myself. Jealousy burrows deep down in my soul in knots more twisted than a viper's and I have the greatest difficulty in refraining from rushing at the canvas and tearing it into shreds.

To be beautiful is to possess in yourself a charm which makes everyone smile at you and welcome you. Even before you speak, everybody is already prejudiced in your favour and disposed to agree with your views. You have only to pass along a street or show yourself on a balcony to

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attract in the crowd friends and mistresses for you. Not to need to be amiable to be loved, to be spared all the expenditure of wit and complaisance which ugliness exacts from you, as well as those thousand moral qualities it is necessary to have to make good the absence of physical beauty—all this proves what a splendid and magnificent gift beauty is!

What could a man desire more than to combine with extraordinary beauty supreme strength, to conceal beneath the skin of Antinous the muscles of Hercules? I am sure that with these two properties and the soul I have, in less than three years, I should be Emperor of the World! Another thing that I have earnestly desired as much as beauty and strength, is the gift of transporting myself with the speed of thought from one place to another. With an angel's wings, a tiger's strength and an eagle's wings, I should begin to discover that the world is not as badly organized as I at first believed. A beautiful mask to seduce and enchant the victim, wings to pounce upon it and to carry it off, and talons to tear it up; till I have these three attributes I shall remain unhappy.

All the passions and tastes I have felt have only been a disguised manifestation of those three desires. I have loved arms, horses and women; arms to replace the nerves I do not possess; horses to serve me as wings; women to provide the beauty of which I am devoid. I have a preference for the most ingenious and deadly arms which deal out wound that cannot be healed. I have never had a chance to use any of these creeses and yataghans, yet I love to have them near around me. I draw them from the sheath with an inexpressible feeling of security and strength. I thrust and parry with them with great energy. And if by any chance I happen to see my face in a mirror, its ferocious expression amazes me. As for horses, I overwork them to death. Had I not

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given up riding Farragus he would have been dead long ago—which would be a great pity, as he is a fine animal. What Arab steed could ever have legs so swift and supple as my desires? With women I have only sought their external appearances, and as those I have so far seen fall far short of my ideal of beauty, I have fallen back on pictures and statues which, after all, are poor makeshifts for a person endowed with such inflamed senses as mine. Still there is something grand and beautiful in loving a statue, for one's love is perfectly disinterested and moreover there is no fear of possible satiety or disgust of triumph, nor there is any reason to expect a second prodigy such as Pygmalion's. The impossible has always captured my fancy.

Is it not strange that although I am still in the prime of my youth and far from having abused everything, have not even used the simplest things, should have reached such a degree of ennui that I am already to be gratified by what is novel or difficult? Satiety follows pleasure, that is a natural and quite intelligible law. For a man who has feasted at a banquet to be longer hungry and to seek to arouse his appetite by spices and stimulants, is easy of explanation; but for a man who sits down at the table, but hardly tastes the first course, to be seized with such strong disgust as to be unable to touch the daintiest dishes without feeling sick, is a phenomenon which can only arise from a particular organism. It is like a six months' old child finding its nurse's milk insipid and only wishing to taste brandy. I am as weary as if I had accomplished all the marvellous feats of Sardanapalus; and yet my life has been very chaste and tranquil to all appearances. It is a mistake to think that possession is the only road that leads to satiety. Desire too can produce the same effect, and abstinence exhausts more than excess. Such desire as mine is more wearisome than possession. Its glance surveys and penetrates the object it



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wishes to have more promptly and profoundly than if it were actually touched. What more could practice teach? What experience can equal such constant and passionate contemplation?

I have engaged myself in so many pursuits though I have not travelled far; and it is only the steepest peaks which tempt me now. I am now a victim of that malady which comes upon powerful men in their old age, the craving for the impossible. There is no attraction for me in anything that I can do. Tiberius, Caligula, Nero, mighty Romans of the Empire, you who have been so badly misunderstood, and whom the crowd of rhetoricians have pursued with their yelps, I suffer from your illness, and I pity you with all the sympathy left in me. I too would like to build a bridge across the sea and pave the waves; I have dreamt of setting fire to the cities to illuminate my festivals. I have desired to be a woman to experience new sensations of pleasures. Your golden house, O Nero! is but a dirty stable compared with the palace I have built for myself. My wardrobe is much better decorated than yours, O Heliogabalus, and more splendid. My circuses are more boisterous and blood-stained than yours, my perfumes stronger and more penetrating, while my slaves are sturdier and more numerous. I too have harnessed to my chariot naked courtesans, and I have trodden on men with as disdainful steps as yours. Colossi of the ancient world, under my weak breast beats heart as great as yours; and had I been in your place I would have done, perhaps overdone, all that you did. How many Babel towers have I heaped up one upon the other to reach the heavens, to strike at the stars and from there to spit down upon the creation. Why then am I not God since I cannot be a man?

Oh! I think it would take hundred thousand centuries of oblivion for me to recuperate from the fatigues of the

twenty years of life. God of heaven! what stone will you roll over me? Into what shadow will you plunge me? At what Lethe will you force me to drink? Beneath what mountain will you bury the Titan? Am I destined to breathe out like a volcano through my mouth and to create earthquakes by turning over from one side to another? When I reflect upon the fact that I was born of a sweet, resigned mother, with such simple tastes and habits, I am surprised that I did not injure her when she was bearing me. How is that none of her pure and serene thoughts have passed into me with the blood she gave me? Why am I the son of her flesh only, and not of her soul? The dove has given birth to a tiger who looks upon the whole creation as his prey.

I have lived in the calmest and the most chaste environment. It is difficult to dream of an existence enshrined with such purity as mine. My years flowed on merrily under the wings of my mother with my little sisters and our dog. I only saw around me the kind and gentle faces of the servants who had grown grey in a service which was often hereditary; relatives and friends, grave and thoughtful, dressed in black, who placed their gloves one by one beside their hats. I had aunts of uncertain age, plump, neat, discreet, wearing spotless linen, grey skirts, knitted mittens, and their hands upon their waist-belts like religious persons. The furniture of plain oak was so severe as to be almost gloomy; the hangings were of leather, the whole comprising just such a sombre and stifling interior as certain Flemish Masters' paint. The garden was damp and dark. The shrubs which divided it into so many sections, the ivy covering the walls and a few pine trees stood there as representing verdure; and they failed in their task. The brick-built house with a high roof, though spacious and preserved in good order, had a certain melancholy drowsiness about it. Truly nothing could be more suitable to an austere life of gloomy isolation than such

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a dwelling. It would have seemed impossible for all the children brought up in such a house not to become priests and nuns. Oh well! in that atmosphere of purity and repose, I was systematically rotting in corruption, without betraying an outward sign, like a medlar on the straw. In the bosom of this honest, pious and saintly family, I attained to a horrible degree of depravity. It was not due to my contact with the world, as I had not seen life, nor to the fire of passion, since I was benumbed by the cold sweat oozing out from the solid walls. The worm that entered into my heart did not come from another fruit. It was born of itself within me, and nothing from outside was evident to warn me that I was spoiled. I bore neither any blemish nor any mark; but I was getting quite hollow within. All that remained was a thin shell of brilliant colour, which would give way under the slightest shock. Is it not an inexplicable thing that a child born of virtuous parents, brought up with scrupulous care and attention, kept far away from any evil influence, could be perverted to such a degree and could arrive at such a stage as I have done? I am sure that even by going back to the sixth preceding generation, it would not be possible to trace among my ancestors a single atom like those of which I am composed. I am not a member of my family; I am not a twig of the old, noble trunk. I am just poisonous fungus which sprang up one stormy night from amidst its mossy roots. And yet no one has ever had more ambitious impulses towards beauty than I, nobody has more stubbornly tried to unfold his wings; but each attempt has made me fall deeper, and that which ought to have been my salvation has actually been my ruin.

Solitude is worse for me than life, though I desire the first rather than the other. Everything which draws me out from myself is beneficial; society bores me, but drags me from my useless and vacant reverie. For that reason, since

our *tete-a-tete* is disturbed, and there are people here with whom I have got to restrain myself, I am less liable to give way to my sullen moods, and I am less tortured by those unseemly desires that pounce upon my heart like a flight of vultures as soon as I am idle even for a moment. There are one or two rather pretty women, and a few gay young men; but among all these provincial folk the one who pleases me most is a young fellow who only arrived here very recently. I liked him at first sight, and I opened my heart to him as I watched him dismounting from his horse. It would be impossible to be more graceful; he is not very tall, but he is very slender and has a well-proportioned physique. There is something soft and undulating in his gait and gestures, which is most agreeable. Many a woman would envy him his hands and feet. His only defect is having too handsome and delicate features for a man. He is blessed with a pair of very black, beautiful eyes, which have such an indefinable expression that is hard to sustain their glance. But as he is very youthful without any semblance of a beard, the perfect softness of the lower part of his face tends to temper somewhat the vivacity of his eagle eyes. His shining, brown hair hangs on his neck in thick curls, which gives his head a distinctive character. Here, at last, is one of the types of beauty of which I dreamt, come to life in my presence! What a pity that he is a man, or that I am not a woman! This Adonis who, apart from his good looks, has a keen and vivid intelligence, enjoys the additional privilege of possessing a silvery, deep-throated voice which one could hardly hear without emotion. Really he is perfect. It seems that he shares my taste for beauty, for his clothes are very expensive and refined; and his horse is a frisky thorough-bred. And, to complete the picture, he was followed by a little page-boy, mounted on a pony, a lad of fourteen or fifteen, blonde, rosy, pretty as a seraphim, who was half-asleep, and

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so much exhausted by his long ride that his master had to lift him from his saddle and carry him in his arms to the room.

Rosette gave him a most hearty reception, and I think she has planned to make use of him to arouse my jealousy, and thus to rekindle the smouldering flame of my dying passion for her. Very dangerous though such a rival must be, I am but little disposed to be jealous; and I feel so much drawn towards him that I would very willingly forego my love to gain his friendship.

### VI

HERE, if the amiable reader will permit, we shall for some time abandon to his fancies the worthy personage who has uptil now monopolized the stage all to his own and spoken only for himself. We shall now revert to the usual form of a romance, without, however, prohibiting the resumption of the dramatic style when necessary, and reserving to us the right of having recourse to the epistolary confessions which the young man indulged in while addressing his friend. For, however sagacious we may be, we do not know so much about the theme as he does.

The little page was so much fatigued that he slept in his master's arms, and his little head wagged to and fro as if he was dead. It was rather a long way from the porch to the room assigned to the new-comer, and the servant who conducted him offered to carry the child. But the young man, who did not appear to have felt the weight of his burden, thanked him without accepting his offer. He put the child gently down upon the sofa, taking a thousand precautions not to awaken him. A mother could not have done more. After the servant had retired and the door was

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closed, he knelt down to remove his boots; but his tired and swollen little feet rendered this operation difficult, and from time to time the pretty sleeper uttered vague and incoherent cries like a person about to wake up. Then the young man stopped and waited till he had gone to sleep again. At last the boots yielded, and the stockings offered but little resistance. Then the master took the two feet of the boy in his hands, and laid them side by side on the sofa. They were really the two most adorable feet in the world, white as new ivory and rather pink from the pressure of the boots which had squeezed them for seventeen hours; they were too tiny even for a woman, and seemed never to have walked. What could be seen of the leg was round, plump, polished, transparent, sinewy, and of exquisite delicacy—a leg worthy of the foot. The young man, still on his knees, was contemplating these two little feet with amorous admiration; he bent down, and kissed both legs repeatedly; then he went up higher till the edge of the clothing was reached. The page opened his eyes, and gave his master a drowsy and grateful glance, which betrayed no surprise. "My belt hurts me," he said as he put his finger under the ribbon, and then fell asleep again. The master unbuckled the sash, raised the page's head with a cushion, and touching his feet, which were becoming a little cooler, carefully wrapped them in his cloak, and seated himself on a chair close to the sofa. Two hours lapsed in this way, the young man watching the child sleep and reading on his forehead the trend of his dreams. The only noise that could be heard in the room was the regular breathing and the ticking of the clock.

It was certainly a very charming picture. In the contrast of these two styles of beauty there was an effect of which a clever painter could have made the greatest use. The master was as lovely as a woman, the page pretty as a young girl. The round and rosy head amidst its hair was

like a peach in its leaves; it had the soft freshness of a velvety skin, though the fatigue of the long journey had robbed some of its usual brightness. The half-open mouth showed little milk-white teeth; and beneath the full, shining temples, there appeared a network of azure veins. The eyelashes, like those golden threads which glitter around the heads of virgins in a missal, reached up to the middle of his cheeks. His long silky hair had gold and at the same time silver tints—gold in the shadow and silver in the light. His neck was at once frail and fleshy; and nothing like the neck of the sex indicated by his garments. Two or three buttons of the doublet which had been opened to facilitate breathing, gave a glimpse of plump and rounded flesh of admirable whiteness and of a faint beginning of a certain curve difficult to explain on the breast of a boy. A close scrutiny would reveal that the pips were a little over-developed. The reader may draw his conclusions as he likes; these are just plain conjectures, for we know no more about it than he does; but we hope to learn more of it in a short while, and we promise to keep him informed of our later discoveries. The reader who is not so short-sighted as we are, may lower his glance under the lace of the doublet and decide for himself whether this contour is prominent or not. But we warn him that the curtains are closed, and the daylight too dim to aid in such investigations.

The young man was pale, but it was a golden pallor, full of vigour and life. His blue eyes and his straight, slender nose lent to his profile a marvellous pride and manliness. His mouth had sometime the sweetest of smiles, but usually it was curved at the corners, just as on those heads to be seen in the paintings of the old Italian masters, rather within than without. And it gave him an admirably disdainful expression, an air of childish petulance and ill-humour, very quaint and charming.

What were the bonds which united the master with the page? Obviously between them there was more than the usual affection subsisting between a master and a servant. Were they two friends or two brothers? Then why this disguise? It would have been difficult for any eye-witness of the scene just described to believe that these two persons were really what they appeared to be.

"How the dear angel sleeps!" whispered the young man. "I don't believe he ever travelled so far before. Twenty leagues on horse-back; I am afraid it will make him ill from fatigue, for he is so delicate. But no, it is nothing serious; to-morrow he will be all right, and will recover his usual bloom, and he will look as fresh as a rose after the rain. How pretty he looks now! If I were not afraid of waking him, I would simply devour him with caresses. What an attractive dimple he has on his chin! Sleep well, my treasure! Ah, how jealous I am of your mother, how I wish I had given you birth! Is he not ill? No! his breathing is regular, and he is moving about. I think somebody is knocking at the door."

In fact there had been two taps, as gentle as possible, at the door.

The young man got up, and fearing he was mistaken, waited for another knock before opening the door. Two more taps, a little louder, were heard, and a gentle voice of a woman whispered: "It is I, Theodore."

Theodore opened the door, but with less alacrity than what a young man usually displays to admit a woman, with a soft sweet voice, who has come mysteriously to tap at your door at nightfall. The door opened to let Rosette in. Rosette was looking rosier than her name, and her heart was deeply stirred like that of a woman entering at night the room of a handsome youth.

"Theodore!" Rosette said. Theodore lifted his finger,



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placing it to his lips as if to imitate a statue of silence; and pointing to the sleeping boy, he led her into the next room.

"Theodore," Rosette resumed; she seemed to find a particular pleasure in repeating his name. All the while she tried to collect her thoughts, while holding in her own the young man's hand with which he had led her to a chair. "Theodore," she repeated, "have you come back at last? What have you been doing all this time? Where have you been? Do you know it is now six months since I saw you last? Ah! Theodore, that is not proper. You owe to a person who loves you, though you do not love her, a little more regard and sympathy."

"What have I done?" he replied, "I hardly know. I have been away and come back. I have slept and I lay awake, I sang and cried, I have been hungry and thirsty. I have been too hot and too cold. I have been bored; now I have less money and am now older by six months—that's all. And yourself, what have you been doing?"

"I have loved you," Rosette answered. "Is that all you have done?"—"Yes, absolutely, I have misused my time, have I not?"—"You could have employed your time better, my poor Rosette; for instance, you could have loved some one who could reciprocate your love."

"I am disinterested in love, just as in everything else. I do not lend my love in the manner of a usurer. I make a pure gift of it," Rosette retorted.

"You have there a very rare virtue which could only exist in a rare soul," Theodore replied. "Very often have I desired to love you, at least in the way you wanted. But there is between us an unsurmountable barrier which I cannot mention to you. Have you had another lover while I have been away?"

"I had one whom I have still."—"What sort of a man

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is he?"—"A poet."—"What kind of a poet is he, and what has he done?"

"I do not really know; a sort of a volume no one understands, I tried to read one evening."

"And so you have for your lover a poet who has not published anything. That must be curious. Is he out at elbow? Are his clothes dirty, and his stockings worn out?"

"No, he dresses well, washes his hands and has no stain of ink on the tip of his nose. He is a friend of De C— whom I met at Mme de Themines. You know her, a big woman who affects childish ways and gives herself little innocent airs."

"May I be permitted to ask the name of this glorious person?"

"Yes, certainly. He is the Chevalier D'Albert."

"Surely that was the young man who was on the balcony when I got down from my horse."

"Precisely so."

"And who looked at me so attentively."

"Exactly so."

"He is a handsome fellow. So, he has not made you forget me."

"No, unfortunately you are not the sort of person one can forget."

"No doubt he loves you dearly."—"I can hardly say. There are times when one would believe he loves me very dearly; but at heart he does not love me, and he is not far from hating me. He has done just as other more experienced people did. He has acquired a keen appetite for passion, and he has been surprised and disappointed when his love has been satiated. It is a mistake to think that they are lovers because a man and a woman have slept together."

"What do you propose to do with this so-called lover who does not love you?"

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"Just the same as is done with the last year's fashion. He is not strong enough to leave me first, and although he does not love me in the real sense of the term, he clings to me from a habit of pleasure, and such ties are the most difficult to break. If I do not help him, he is capable of conscientiously sticking to me till the Doomsday, and even beyond that; for he has in him the germ of every quality, and the flowers of his soul only needs to open themselves out in the sunshine of eternal love. Really I regret at not being able to provide that sunshine to him. Of all the lovers I have not loved, he is the one I like best; and if I were not so good, I should not give him back his freedom, and I should still keep him. Yet I will not do that; I have just finished making use of him."

"How much longer will it last?" asked Theodore.

"A fortnight, or three weeks, but certainly less than it would have lasted if you had not come. I know that I shall never be your mistress. There is, you say, an unknown reason, to which I should submit if you could allow yourself to disclose it to me. And so all hope in that direction is forbidden. And yet I cannot choose to be the mistress of another when you are here. It would amount to be a profanation, which would make me feel that I no longer have the right to love you."

"Do keep him for the love of me."

"If it pleases you, I will do so. Ah! if you could have been mine, how different my life would have been! The world has a very false idea of me, and I should have passed out of sight without anyone appreciating what I was, except you. Therefore, the only person who has understood me and at the same time treated me so cruelly. I have never desired anyone save you for my lover, and you I have never had. If you had loved me, Theodore, I should have remained chaste and virtuous, I should have proved myself

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worthy of you; but instead, now I shall leave (if anyone would at all care to remember me) behind me the reputation of a *femme galante*—a sort of courtesan who only differed from those of the street by my rank and wealth. I was born with the most noble faculties of mind; but nothing depraves a person as much as never being loved. Many despise me, without knowing how much I suffered in the process of bringing myself down to this state. Being fully assured that I could never belong to the only person I really loved, I let myself to drift and I have not taken the least trouble to preserve the purity of my body which could never be enjoyed by you. As for my heart no one ever possessed it and never will. It solely belongs to you, though you have broken it. I am different in this respect from those women who call themselves honourable as long as they do not change their beds often. I, on my part, in spite of my promiscuities, have remained faithful in heart and soul to the thought of you. At least I shall have made a few people happy; I shall have made sweet illusions dance round a few white pillows. I have innocently deceived more than one noble heart. I was feeling so miserable at being rejected by you that I have been always frightened by the idea of inflicting a similar punishment on some one else. This is the sole motive behind many of my adventures which have been usually attributed to a mere spirit of licentiousness. To think me a libertine, O God, what an idea! Should you know, Theodore, how profoundly painful it is to feel that one's life has been a failure, that happiness has passed by, to see that the world misunderstands you without giving you any chance to alter that opinion, that your finest qualities are converted into vices, your purest essences into black poisons, that nothing but your dark side has been exposed; to have found the door always open for viewing your vices only and always closed on your virtues, and to be unable to

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bring to perfection, among so many rank weeds, a single lily or rose: you cannot realize how painful is all this, Theodore!"

"Alas! Alas! Rosette: what you have said sums up the history of the whole world. The better part of us is the one that remains within us, which we cannot produce. Poets are like that. Their most beautiful verses are the ones they have not written: they carry more poems to their grave than they leave behind."

"I shall carry my poem with me."

"And so shall I, who have not composed one in his heart? The cruel tyrants may have written some poems which are laved with the tears of sweetest sensitiveness; some poets may have penned poems which were only fit for the tyrants, so red and monstrous they are."

"Yes. I could have some white roses placed upon my tomb. I have had ten lovers, but I am a virgin at heart, and I shall ever remain so. Many maidens upon whose graves there is a never-ceasing shower of jasmine and orange blossoms, were veritable Messalinas."

"I know what you are worth, Rosette."—"You alone in the world know what I am, Theodore, for you have seen me under the shock of a love which is true and deep and yet without hope, and he who has not seen a woman in love cannot say what she is. That is what comforts me in my bitterness."

"What do you think of this young man who, in the eyes of the world, is your lover?"

"A lover's thoughts are deeper than the Bay of Biscay, and it is very hard to estimate the innermost thoughts of a man. Even if the lead were attached to a rope a hundred thousand fathoms long and were let down into his heart, it would never touch its bottom. Yet I have touched the bottom in a few places, and the apparatus has brought up sometimes mud, sometimes beautiful shells, but more often

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mud and bits of coral mixed together. His opinion of me has often varied. He has begun where others left off; he despised me, as young men with vivid imagination are apt to do so. There is always a sharp fall in the first step they take, and the transition from their chimera to reality cannot happen without a shock. He despised me, and I amused him. Now he esteems me and I bore him. In the early days of our liaison he only saw the banal side of me, and I think the certainty of not encountering resistance accounted for much in his determination. He appeared to be in a hurry to have a love-affair, and I at first thought it was due to an emotional overflow of his heart which only seeks an outlet; one of those vague loves youth generally develops in the month of May, which are such that, failing a woman, arms would wind round the trunks of trees, and kisses would be showered upon the flowers and grass in the meadows. But it was not of that kind; it passed through me to reach another goal. I was to serve as a means, and not an end. Beneath the freshness of his twenty years, beneath his adolescent moustache, he concealed a profound corruption. He was very much contaminated in his heart; he was like a fruit containing within itself nothing but ashes. In his young, vigorous body, was stirring a soul as old as Saturn, and as incurably unhappy as ever. I confess, Theodore, I was scared and I feel giddy while leaning over the sinister depths of his existence. Your sorrows and mine are but a trifle compared to his. If I had loved him more, I should have killed him. Something attracts and imperiously calls him, something which is not of or in this world, and there is no respite for him, day and night. Like heliotrope in a cave, he twists himself to turn towards the sun which he cannot see. He is one of those men whose souls have not been dipped long enough in the waters of Lethe before being attached to the body,

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for it retains of the heavens from where it comes memories of eternal beauty which torment and worry him, and his soul remembers that it once had wings, and has now only feet. If I were God, I would condemn the guilty angel to two eternities without poetry. Instead of having to build a castle for such a youthful and lively fancy, a tower was needed as high as the eight superimposed temples of Belus. I was no match for this, I pretended not to have understood him, and I let him crawl upon his wings in search of a peak from which to launch himself into the immense space. He believes that I have noticed nothing of all that, because I submitted to all his caprices without appearing to suspect the object I wished, being unable to cure him—and I trust that it will be one day noted to my credit before God—to afford him at least the happiness of believing that he was loved passionately. He inspired in me pity and interest to a degree that enabled me to assume a tone and manner tender enough to give him that pleasing illusion. I played my part like a consummate actress. I was gay and sad, sensitive and voluptuous by turns; I feigned uneasiness and jealousy. I shed false tears, and I called forth to my lips a flood of pleasant smiles. I arranged this dummy of love in the most gorgeous attire; I made it parade in the avenues of my park; I invited all the birds to sing as it passed, and all the flowers to bend their heads in salutation. I made it sail over my lake upon the silvery back of my beloved swan; I hid myself within, and I lent it my voice my spirit, my beauty and my youth; I gave it so seductive an appearance that the reality was not equal to my sham. When the time comes to shatter the hollow statue, I shall do it, in order to spare him remorse, in such a way that he will believe that all the fault is on my side. I shall be the one to furnish the hole through which the gas filling the balloon may escape. Is not that a holy deception and a

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honourable fraud? I preserve in a crystal urn a few tears I gathered just as they were about to fall. This is my casket of jewels and diamonds, and I will present them to the angel who comes to take me into the presence of God."

"They are more beautiful," Theodore answered, "than those which gleam on any woman's neck. A queen's jewels are not their equal. For myself I think that the perfume Magdalene poured upon the feet of Christ was composed of the tears of those whom she had consoled, and I also think that with such tears is sprinkled the path of St. James, and not, as it has often been suggested, with drops of the milk of Juno. Who will ever do for you what you did for him?"

"No one, alas, since you cannot."

'O my dear soul! It is impossible. But pray, do not lose all hope. You have still beauty and youth. You have many avenues of limes and acacias to traverse before reaching that damp dark alley of bushes and dried-up trees, which leads from the tomb of porphyry, where your lovely, dead years will be interred, to the mossy stone sepulchre in which they will hastily push down the remains of what was you along with the wrinkled and tattered ghosts of your old age. In your life there are still many mountains to climb, and it will be a long while before you reach the peak of perpetual snow. Now you are only in the region of aromatic plants, of limpid cascades where the iris hangs in multi-coloured arches, of beautiful green oaks and sweet-smelling pine trees. Climb still a little higher, and from that point in the wider horizon stretched out before you, you will perhaps see the bluish smoke emerging from the roof under which sleeps your lover. You should therefore not give way to despair, at the very outset of your life. Life always opens with visions of the unexpected. The life of man has often reminded me of a pilgrim who ascends the winding stair of a Gothic tower. The long granite serpent



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twines in the dark his coils, each scale of which is a step. After a few turns, the light from the doorway is blotted out. The shadow of the houses around the tower does not permit the sun's rays to penetrate through the airholes. The walls are gloomy and humid, it is more like a descent into a dungeon from where one will never return than ascending a tower which from below appears so lofty and slender, and adorned with its carving and tracery, as if it is in gala dress. One hesitates to climb farther up, so depressing is its damp darkness. A few more turns of the staircase, and more light comes in to outline the golden trefoils upon the opposite wall. The jagged gables of the houses, the carving of the entablatures, and the quaint staples of the chimneys then appear in view, and a few steps more, and the eye looks down upon the entire city; it is a forest of pinnacles, spires and towers which crowd on all sides. The domes and cupolas are rounded like the breasts of giantesses or the skulls of Titans. Houses and palaces are isolated by bright or shaded streets. A few more steps and you will be on the platform, and then you will see beyond the environs of the city the green valleys, the blue hills and the white sails on the wavy ribbon of the river. Dazzling sunlight overwhelms you, and swallows, with cries of joy, pass nearby. The far-off hum of the city comes to you like a friendly murmur or the buzzing of a bee-hive. All the steeple bells sound in the air their raucous peals. The breeze wafts to you the fragrance of the neighbouring forest and of the wild flowers. There is nothing but light, harmony and perfume. If you had become weary and had rested on a lower step, or if you had turned back, this spectacle would have been entirely lost to you. Sometimes the tower has but a single opening in the middle or at the top. The tower of our life is built in similar fashion. Then it requires more obstinate courage and more desperate perseverance to cling

to the projections of the stone to obtain a full view of the resplendent country. Or else the loop-holes have been filled up, or perhaps, they have been absent altogether and then it becomes necessary to climb right up to the summit. But the higher you climb in the darkness, the more immense does the horizon seem, and the greater the surprise and pleasure."

"O, Theodore," Rosette replied, "may God grant that I could soon reach the spot where the window is! Long have I ascended the spiral stairs in the deepest gloom; but I am afraid that the opening may have been filled up and I must have to climb up to the summit. And what will happen if the staircase with its never-ending steps terminates in nothing but a walled-up doorway or an arched stone roof?"

"Don't say that, Rosette. Do not even think of it. What architect would construct a staircase without any outlet? Why do you suppose the peaceful designer of world to be more stupid or short-sighted than an ordinary architect? God never errs; and He forgets nothing. It is impossible to believe that. He would care to amuse Himself by enclosing you in a long stone tunnel that has no outlet or opening. Why do you think, poor insignificant ants as we are, that He would grudge us the miserable happiness of a moment? To do that, He would need the ferocity of a tiger or a judge. And if we incur His displeasure, He has only to order a comet to divert a little from its course, and strangle us with a hair of its tail. How could it amuse Him to impale us one by one on a gold pin as Domitian used to do with flies? God is not like a concierge or a commissionaire, nor is He yet in his second childhood. All such petty meannesses are beneath His dignity and He is not like a simpleton trying to show off his wits and play tricks on us. Have courage, Rosette, more courage! If you are out of breath, stop a while to recover, and then resume your

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march upwards. You have perhaps only twenty steps more to climb to reach the embrasure from which you would perceive your happiness."

"Never, Oh, never! If ever I reach the top it will only be to throw myself headlong from it."

"Chase away, poor afflicted soul, all these sinister ideas which hover round you like bats and cast the dark shadow of their wings over your lovely brow. If you want me to love you, be happy and do not weep." He drew her towards him and imprinted a kiss on her eye.

"What a misfortune for me to have met you!" Rosette replied; "and yet, if I were to have my time over again, I should still wish to know you. Your harshness has been sweeter to me than other men's passion; and although you have made me suffer so much, all my pleasure has emanated from you. Through you I have caught a glimpse of what I might have been. You have been a light in the darkness of my night, and you have illumined many of the dark recesses of my soul. You have opened up new vistas in my life. I owe it to you that I have known love even if it was an unhappy love. But there is in this unrequired love a profound and melancholy charm, and it is beautiful to remember those who have forgotten us. There is even a special kind of happiness in loving when love comes only from your side; and many die without having experienced it; they are more to be pitied than those who love."

"They suffer and feel the pain of their wounds, but they at least live. They have something to think of; they have a planet around which they gravitate, an axis to revolve round. They have something to desire; they can say to themselves: "If I get there, if I have that, I shall be happy." They suffer from frightful agonies, but when dying then can at least say: "I die for him." To die in this manner is to be born again. The real, the only incurably unfortunate are

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those whose crazy embrace clasps the whole universe, those who want everything and want nothing ; who, should an angel or a fairy were to ask them suddenly, 'Say what you desire and you will have it,' would not know what answer to give; they would remain silent and embarrassed."

"If the fairy would ever come, I know well what I should ask for," Rosette interposed.

"You know it, Rosette ; and in that respect, you are happier than I am, for I do not know. In me there are many vague desires which mingle together and produce others, only to be devoured by them afterwards. My desires are like a flock of birds which hover and whirl about aimlessly. Your desire is an eagle with its eye fixed on the sun, and is only prevented by the lack of air from rising to it on its unfolded wings. Ah ! if I only could know what I desire. If the idea which pursues me only stood out clear and distinct from the surrounding mist ; if the favourable or fatal star appeared in my heaven ; if the ray of light I am to follow shone through the night, whether perfidious will-o'-the-wisp or hospitable beacon ; if my pillar of fire guided me across the arid deserts without manna or fountains ; would that I only knew where I was going, even were my destination to be a precipice. I would much prefer the mad chase of the huntsman through deep thickets and quagmires to this absurd and monotonous tramping. My present position is similar to that of the horse which, with blind-folded eyes, turns the wheel of a grindstone and trudges along thousands of miles without seeing anything or ever changing his position. I have turned round long enough, and the cage ought soon to be at the top."

"There are many points of resemblance between you and Albert, and when I hear you speak sometimes it seems to me that he is speaking. I am quite sure when you know him better, you will become deeply attached to him. You cannot

fail to like each other. He is tormented, just as you are, with these impetuous, aimless impulses ; he loves immensely without knowing whom. He would like to soar up into the heavens for the earth appears to him but a footstool hardly worthy of his feet ; and he is more arrogantly proud than Lucifer before his fall."

"I, at first, feared," Theodore replied, " that he might be one of those poets, and there are so many of them, who have chased poetry away from the earth, one of those who string together false pearls, who can see nothing but the last syllable of a word, and who, when they have rhymed a few simple words, conscientiously cross their arms and legs, and allow the spheres to complete their revolutions."

"He is not one of that sort. His verses do not represent his real personality ; they are much below the standard of his true self. They would give an erroneous idea of his personality. His real poem is himself, and I do not know whether he will ever compose another. He has, deep down in his soul, a seraglio of beautiful ideas which he protects within a triple wall, and he is more jealous of them than any Sultan ever was of his odalisques. He only puts into his verses the ideas he does not care for, or with which he is disheartened and his verses are the gateway through which he expels them, and he only gives to the world what he no longer wants."

"I can well understand such jealousy and shame. In the same way many persons do not appreciate the love they had till they have lost it, and their mistresses till they are dead."

"It is so difficult to preserve something of one's own in this world. Every torch attracts moths, every treasure invites thieves. I love those silent people who carry their ideals away to their grave and refuse to leave them to the dirty kisses and the shameless contacts of the mob. I like those lovers who never carve the name of their mistresses on tree-trunks, who do not entrust them to any echo, and who, while sleeping, are

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pursued by the fear that they may pronounce them in a dream. I am of a similar nature. I have never given expression to my thoughts, and none shall know whom I love. But it is now nearly eleven, my dear Theodore; and I am keeping you from a rest of which you must be sorely in need. Whenever I have to leave you, I always feel a deep gloom in my heart; and it seems to me that it will be the last time I shall see you. I put it off as long as I can, but still at last I have to part. Good-night, friend!"

Theodore put his arm around her waist, and led her to the doors. There he stopped, and for a while riveted his glance on her. The corridor had some little square windows through which moonlight danced, thus producing fantastic interplay of light and shadow. At each window Rosette's white and perfect form gleamed like a silver phantom; then it disappeared, to appear again even more brilliant a little farther ahead. At last she finally vanished.

Theodore, buried in profound thought, remained motionless for a few moments with his arms folded; then he passed his hand across his brow, and throwing back his hair by a movement of the head, returned to the bedroom. After kissing the forehead of the page who was still asleep, he retired to rest.

## VII

At daybreak d'Albert paid Rosette a visit, as he was unusually eager to meet her.

"Well, so you have come here quite early—I should say very early if ever you cared really to come very early. As a reward for your gallantry, I am offering you my hand to kiss."

She drew forth from under the lace-trimmed bedsheet the prettiest little hand that formed a part of a round, plump arm.

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D'Albert kissed it with compunction. "And the other one, her little sister, may I not kiss her too?"

"O yes; nothing is more agreeable. I am in my Sunday mood to-day. Here it is." She took her other hand out of bed, and lightly stroked him on the mouth with it. "Am I not the most obliging woman in the world?"

"You are grace personified, and you should have white marble shrines erected in your honour amid groves of myrtle. Really, I am afraid what happened to Psyche might befall you, and Venus would become jealous of you," said d'Albert, as he folded her two lovely hands and lifted them to his lips.

"How you can recite all that in a single breath! It seems that you have learnt these phrases by heart." Rosette said with a delicious little pout.

"No, you richly deserve original phrases coined specially in your honour, and you are entitled to inspire first fruits of poesy," d'Albert replied.

"Oh, yes, decidedly. But what has stung you to-day! Is it because you are sick that you are so gallant? I am afraid you are going to die. Do you know that when a person suddenly changes his character without any plausible reason, it is a bad omen? Now, it is a well known fact, confirmed by all the women who have taken the trouble to love you, that you are usually sulky; and it is no less certain that you could not possibly be more pleasant and charming as you are just now. Your amiability is quite inexplicable. But, my dear Albert, you look very pale. Give me your arm, I want to feel your pulse," and she lifted his sleeve and counted the beat with comic gravity. "No, you are quite all right, and you have not the slightest symptoms of fever. Then I must be awfully attractive this morning. Bring me my mirror; I want to see why you are so gallant."

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D'Albert picked up a little mirror from the dressing table, and placed it on the bed.

"Really," Rosette said, "you are not quite wrong. Why do you not compose a sonnet to my eyes, Sir Poet? You ought to do so. How unfortunate I am! To have eyes like mine and to have a poet like yourself as lover, and yet to be bereft of sonnets, as if I were cock-eyed and had a porter for a lover! You do not love me, Sir. You have not even cared to compose an acrostic sonnet. And what do you think of my mouth? Still, I have kissed you with this mouth, and perhaps may again kiss you, my beautiful gloomy lover. And really it is a favour you hardly deserve. (This remark does not apply to you to-day, for you are worth anything at this moment). But let me change this topic about myself. This morning your beauty and freshness are beyond comparison. You are like a brother of Aurora; and although it is hardly daylight, you are already gaily adorned as if you are going to a ball. Perchance you have some designs on me. Do you want to make a conquest of me? But I forget that you have already done that, and it is now a part of ancient history."

"Rosette, don't joke like that; you know very well that I love you."

"Ah! that depends. I am not so sure; what about you?"

"Most assuredly so! If you are good enough to bang your doors against me, I should try to demonstrate my love to you, very successfully too, I believe."

"No, however much I should like to be convinced, my door shall remain open. I am too pretty to hide myself within closed doors. The sun shines for the whole world, and my beauty will, if you please, imitate the sun."

"Frankly speaking, I find that not at all pleasing. But



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do please act, as if I would approve of it. I am your most humble slave and I surrender my will at your feet."

"That is excellent! Do not change this mood, and leave the key on the doors of your room this evening."

"Monsieur le Chevalier Theodore de Serannes," announced the big head of a smiling, burly Negro, as it appeared in the doorway, "begs to be permitted to show his respects to you, and prays that you may deign to receive him."

"Show in Monsieur le Chevalier," said Rosette, while pulling the bed-sheet up to her chin.

Theodore first turned towards Rosette's bed, and made her a very deep and graceful bow, which she acknowledged with a friendly nod. And, afterwards, faced d'Albert whom he greeted in a genial and courteous manner. "Perhaps I have interrupted an interesting conversation," said Theodore, "please resume, and do let me know the trend of your talk in a few words."

Theodore seated himself at the foot of Rosette's bed, as d'Albert had taken his place near the pillow by virtue of being the first comer. The conversation for some time flitted from one topic to another, in a very gay, clever and lively fashion; and for that reason we shall not reproduce it. Besides I am afraid it would lose much of its charm through transcription. The air, tone and fire of the words and gestures, the thousand and one nuances and all their wit, like the sparkle of champagne which bubbles and evaporates at once, are things which it is not possible to record. It is a hiatus we leave the reader to fill, and he would do it better than we could. So, let the reader imagine five or six pages containing the finest, most capricious, and fantastic, most elegant and sparkling conversation. We know very well that we are here having recourse to an artifice which, in some respects, recalls that of Timanthes, who, despairing of

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adequately reproducing the face of Agamemnon, threw a drapery over his head. But we prefer to be timid rather than imprudent.

It would not be perhaps irrelevant to inquire into the motives behind d'Albert's early rising and to find out the reasons which drove him to visit Rosette so early as if he had still loved her. Apparently it looked like a gesture of suppressed jealousy. Certainly he did not care very much for Rosette, and he would have gladly parted from her. But at least he desired the rupture to be brought about by his initiative and not by Rosette's, for in the latter case his masculine vanity would be deeply wounded, however thoroughly his love for her had vanished. Theodore was such a ladies' man that it was difficult to see him appear without apprehending that all eyes would turn in his direction, and hearts would soon follow the eyes. And it is strange but true that although he had snatched away many women from their lovers, no aggrieved victims seemed to feel towards him that long-standing resentment, which usually happens to the lot of such a usurper. He had, in all his varying moods, such an invincible charm, such a natural grace, something so soft and at once proud, that even men were susceptible to its influence. D'Albert who had visited Rosette with the intention of speaking very dryly to Theodore if he should meet him there, was himself surprised at not experiencing any feeling of anger towards him, and at responding to his advances so affably. After half an hour you would have thought that they were two old school-chums; yet d'Albert was convinced that if ever Rosette was to love a man it would be this person, and he had every reason to be jealous of Theodore in the future at least, though for the present he had as yet no grounds for suspicion. What would he have thought, if he had seen the belle in white dressing gown glide like a moth in a moon-beam into the

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room of the handsome young man and not emerge till three or four hours later, and then with mysterious precautions? He would perhaps have considered himself more unlucky than he actually was, for it very rarely happens that a pretty and amorous woman leaves the room of her handsome gentleman friend exactly in the same condition in which she first entered it.

Rosette listened to Theodore most attentively as a woman listens to her beloved. But his conversation was so varied and diverting that her attention could be natural and quite easily comprehensible. So, d'Albert did not take any offence. Theodore's love towards Rosette was polite and friendly, but nothing more.

"What shall we do to-day, Theodore?" Rosette asked: "shall we go out in a boat? What do you say to that? Or shall we go hunting?"

"Let us go out hunting. That is less gloomy than rowing upon the water side by side with a bored swan and disturbing leaves of water-lilies right and left. Don't you think so, d'Albert?"

"I would perhaps just as well let myself adrift in a boat down the river as gallop madly in pursuit of a poor animal. But wherever you will go I will follow. Now let us allow Madame Rosette to get up and don a proper dress."

Rosette made a sign of assent, and rang for her maid to come and dress her. The two young men went off arm in arm, and it was not easy to guess, in seeing them such good friends, that one was the official lover and the other the sweetheart of the lady.

Everybody was soon ready. D'Albert and Theodore were on horseback in the courtyard, when Rosette, in her riding costume, appeared on the steps. She wore a lively and resolute mien, which suited her admirably. She sprang up in the saddle with her usual alertness, and administered a

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sharp whip to the horse which flew like a dart; d'Albert with a touch of the spurs, soon joined her. Theodore allowed them to get ahead of him, as he was certain of overtaking them when he pleased. He seemed to have been expecting something, and often turned round in the direction of the Chateau.

"Theodore! Theodore! come along! Are you riding a wooden horse?" Rosette shouted. Theodore put his horse into a gallop, and made up the intervening gap that separated him from Rosette. But he did not come close to her.

He again looked towards the Chateau which was receding from the view. A little cloud of dust in which an indistinct object was moving quickly appeared at the end of the road. In a few minutes, it came close to Theodore, and out of it emerged the fresh, rosy face of the mysterious page.

"Theodore! Come along!" Rosette again shouted, "spur on your tortoise, and join us."

Theodore loosened the reins of his animal, and in a few seconds he passed by Rosette and d'Albert. "He who loves me follows me!" said Theodore, as he jumped over a four-feet high fence. "Ah well! Mr. Poet" said he from the other side, "you are not taking the leap! Yet your steed is winged, so they say."

"Well, I prefer going round the fence; I have but only one head to break, after all; if I had more to spare, I would try," d'Albert replied, smiling.

"So, none loves me, since no one follows me," Theodore said, dropping rather unusually the curved corners of his mouth. The little page fixed his big, blue eyes on him, with a look of reproach, and dug his heels into the sides of his horse. The horse took a prodigious leap. "Yes, somebody does" said he, as he landed himself on the other side of the fence.

Rosette cast a weird glance at the boy, and blushed up to

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her eyes. Then, whipping her mare sharply, she jumped over the fence.

"Do you think, Theodore, that I do not love you as well?"

The boy threw a sidelong glance at her from under his eyelashes, and drew near Theodore.

D'Albert was already riding in the middle of the alley, and saw nothing of all this, for from time immemorial it has been the privilege of fathers, husbands and lovers to be blind.

"Isnabel," Theodore said, "you are crazy, and you, Rosette, are you mad? Isnabel, you did not allow your horse enough room to jump, and you, Rosette, only just missed catching your frock on the post. You might have killed yourself."

"What does it matter?" Rosette replied in a voice so sad and melancholy that Isnabel forgave her for having jumped over the barrier. They proceeded a little farther, and reached the spot where the meet was to start. Six arches, cut through the depths of the forest, terminated near a small hexagonal tower on each side of which was engraved the name of the road. The trees were so tall that they seemed to touch the fleecy clouds which a mild breeze set floating over their tops, while the thick, long grass and impenetrable bushes provided shelter for the game. The hunt seemed to be promising. It was a real old-world forest, with oaks of more than a hundred years old, such as we never see in these days when trees are no longer planted and people have not the necessary patience to wait for those already planted to grow fully. The forest was a hereditary property planted by the great-grandfathers for the fathers, by the fathers for the grandsons; it was furnished with avenues of gigantic width, an obelisk surmounted by a bell, a rock-work fountain, and the usual lake. There were the powdered game-keepers clad

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in yellow leather-breeches and sky-blue coats ; and a multitude of dog's tails, like crescents, waved hither and thither in a cloud of dust. The signal was given ; the dogs were let loose, and the chase commenced. We shall not narrate in details the movements of the stag through the forest. We do not even know whether it was a full-sized stag, and our inquiries have not satisfied us on that point, distressing though it is to admit it. However, we think that in so ancient, shaded and majestic a forest there ought to have been only well-developed stags ; and we do not see any reason why the stag after which the four principal characters of this story galloped upon multi-coloured horses was not one of these.

The stag was a champion runner ; and the pursuit of fifty dogs at his heels spurred him on to break the record of his own speed. The race was so excitingly sharp that the dogs could bark only rarely.

Theodore, being the most accomplished horseman and mounted on the finest horse, was urging the pack vigorously. D'Albert was close behind ; Rosette and the little page Isnabel followed them, but they were separated from the company by an ever-widening gap. Finally, they lagged so far behind that it was not possible for them to recover the lost ground.

"Suppose we stop for a little while to let our horses regain their breath," Rosette suggested. "The chase is running towards the direction of the lake, and I know a short-cut by which we can overtake them."

Isnabel drew in the reins of his pony, who dropped his head and began to scratch the ground with his hoofs.

This pony formed the perfect contrast possible to Rosette's mare. He was black as midnight, while the mare was silver-white. He was shaggy and unkempt, while the other's mane was plaited with blue ribbon, and tail curled

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and combed. One was like a unicorn, while the other resembled a poodle.

The same contrast was to be observed between the two riders. Rosette's hair was as black as Isnabel's was fair. Her eye-lashes were clearly and distinctly marked; the page's were scarcely distinguished from the skin, and looked like a blossom on the peach.

The complexion of Rosette was bright and florid like the mid-day sun, while the other's was transparently red like the shades of early dawn.

"Shall we now try to fall in with the hunt?" Isnabel asked Rosette, "The horses have now recovered."

"Come along!" replied the lovely Amazon, as she set off at full gallop along a narrow cross-path leading to the lake. The two horses riding side by side, occupied the entire space of the road. On Isnabel's side a gnarled and knotted tree threw out a thick branch and seemed to shake its fist at the riders. The boy did not notice it. "Take care," Rosette cried out; "stoop low in your saddle or else you will fall down."

But the warning came too late; the bough struck Isnabel in his middle. Owing to the violence of the impact, he lost his hold on the stirrups; the pony continued to gallop and he was lifted out of the saddle and fell down heavily on his back.

The boy became unconscious. Rosette, greatly frightened, jumped down from her saddle and hastened to the page who gave no apparent sign of life.

His cap had dropped, and his beautiful blonde hair lay dishevelled on the ground. His little hands were like wax, so pale they were. Rosette knelt by his side and tried to bring him back to consciousness. But she had no flask, no smelling-salts with her; and she was highly agitated. At last she found a deep rut in which the rain-water had found

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its way. She dipped her fingers in it, and poured a few drops on the temples of the young page. This did not produce any effect on him, and the drops of water trickled down his white cheeks like pearls or like the tears of sylphs upon the leaves of a lotus. Rosette, apprehending that his tight clothes might be choking him, undid his belt and unbuttoned his jersey to allow his chest more freedom. Rosette then saw something which would have given a most agreeable surprise to a man but which did not seem to please her at all, for her eyebrows contracted and her upper lip trembled slightly. She saw a very white breast, slightly developed, but giving the most delightful promise—a round, polished beautiful ivory bosom, pleasant to see, more pleasing to kiss.

"A woman!" she exclaimed. "A woman! Ah, Theodore!"

Isabel, for we shall continue to call him by that name though it was not his, began to breathe and languidly raised his eyelids. He was not hurt, but simply stunned. Soon he recovered, and with Rosette's aid remounted his pony who had stopped as soon as he lost the rider.

They rode slowly to the lake where they rejoined the hunt. Rosette told Theodore briefly what had happened. The latter changed colour often, when Rosette was relating the story, and on the way back he rode by the side of Isabel.

They got back to the chateau early. The day which began so merrily ended in gloom.

Rosette was dreamy, and d'Albert fell deep into reverie. The reader will soon come to know the reason.

### VIII

No, my dear Silvio, I have not forgotten you. I am not one of those men who never look behind. My past pursues me,



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and encroaches on the present and almost on my future too. Your friendship is one of the bright spots which marks itself out distinctly from the blue horizon of my latter years; in fact, from my present position I often turn back to contemplate it with a sentiment of ineffable melancholy.

Oh! What a glorious time it was! How divinely pure we were. We scarcely trod this earth with our feet; we had wings as it were, our desires carried us away, and the zephyr of the spring made the blonde aureole of youth quiver around our brows.

Do you remember that little island covered with poplars, at the spot where the river bifurcated. To get there we had to pass over a long, narrow plank which was a bit shaky in the middle. It was really a bridge for goats—even hardly good enough for them. It was so delightful. A small, grassy lawn, a yellow pathway forming a girdle of the island's green dress encircling it at the waist, and an ever-moving shade of aspens and poplars—all these were not the least attractive charms of this paradise. Women used to spread there large white pieces of linen to bleach them in the sun, you would have mistaken them for square sheets of snow. And that young maid, dark and sun-burnt whose big, wild eyes shone so brilliantly under her long plaits of hair, who ran after the goats, threatening them with her osier stick, when they chanced to tread over the linen which she was guarding. Do you remember her? And the saffron-coloured butterflies with their unsteady flight, and the kingfisher we so often tried to catch, with its nest in the alder thicket. And those steps of the river so roughly hewn, green at the bottom and always obstructed by a lattice-work of branches. How limpid and gleaming was the water, displaying the golden gravel below! How delightful it was to sit on the bank with our feet dangling in the stream! The water-lilies with their golden flowers gracefully unfold-

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ing themselves, looked like green tresses floating on the agate back of some bathing nymph. The sky reflected itself in that mirror with azure smiles and the most enchanting pearl-grey transparencies, and at all hours of the day there were turquoises, spangles, waves of cotton and silk of infinite variety.

How I loved those squadrons of little ducks with emerald necks, which continually swam from one bank to the other, making so many ripples on that pure, liquid crystal! We figured ourselves so fittingly in that landscape. How perfectly we identified ourselves with that gentle, serene nature, and how easily we harmonized with it. Spring abroad, youth within, the sun upon the grassy meadow, a smile on the lips, snowy white blossoms on every bush, white illusions welling up in our souls, a blush of shame on our cheeks and on the dog-roses, poetry warbling in our hearts, unseen birds chirping in the trees; light, cooings, perfumes, a thousand confused sounds, a heart beating and palpitating, the water moving a pebble away, a drop of water trickling down a flower, a tear trembling on an eyelid, a sigh of love, and the rustle of leaves... What pleasant evenings we spent there, walking slowly so close to the edge that often we had one foot in the water and the other on the bank!

Alas! that did not last long, in my case at least, for even when you acquired knowledge and maturity, you still preserved your childlike candour. The germ of corruption inherent in me developed very quickly, and the gangrene was ruthlessly eating into all that was pure and holy within me. The only good thing left in me was my friendship for you.

I have never concealed anything from you, whether it be thought or action. I have laid bare to you most secret

fibres of my being. However strange, ridiculous or crazy are the movements of my soul, I have never failed to describe them to you. But my experiences of late are really so strange that I hardly dare to acknowledge them to myself. Somewhere I expressed to you my apprehensions that through all my earnest efforts to seek and attain the beautiful, I might in the long run fall into something monstrous or impossible. I have nearly reached that stage. When shall I steer clear of these contrary currents which set me adrift hither and thither? When will the deck of my ship stop trembling beneath my feet, and will no longer be swept away by tempestuous waves? Where shall I find a haven to set anchor, and an immovable rock out of the reach of the sea where I can dry myself and wring out the foam from my hair?

You know how ardently I have sought for physical beauty, how highly I estimate the external form and how keenly I am attracted by the visible world. It must be that I am too hopelessly corrupted and blase to entertain any faith in moral beauty or to pursue it effectively. I have been totally lost to the sense of good and evil. My depravity has degraded me to the primitive stage of a savage and an ignorant child. Truly I do not find anything which is worthy of praise or blame, and even the strangest happenings hold no surprise for me. My conscience is both deaf and mute. To me adultery seems to be the most innocent thing in the world. I think it quite natural that a maiden should consent to prostitute herself. I could betray my friends without feeling the slightest compunction, and I would not scruple to push down the precipice with my foot those people who bored me, if they happened to walk with me along the brink. I could watch unconcernedly the most atrocious scenes; and there is something in the miseries and misfortunes of humanity over which I could gloat. I should ex-

perience at the sight of some awful calamity befalling the world the same bitter and sinister pleasure as one feels when avenging an old wrong.

O World! What have you done to me to excite my deadly hatred? What has made me so much bitter against you? I must have expected something extraordinary from you, or else why should I nurse so much rancour against you over my disappointment. What high hopes have you brought to nought? What eagle's wings have you clipped? What doors were you to open, which had remained closed, and which of us two has failed the other?

I am touched by nothing, moved by nothing. Accounts of heroic deeds do no longer send any sublime thrills through all my body which formerly used to do. On the contrary, all this looks a little foolish to me. No accent is penetrating enough to bite into the distended fibres of my heart and set them vibrating. I look upon the tears flowing from the eyes of my fellowmen as though they were just drops of rain, unless they have a charming clearness or the light reflects in them picturesquely or they run down from a beautiful cheek. It is only for animals that I still feel some sympathy. I could bear the sight of a peasant or a servant being mercilessly beaten, but I would not stand by and watch without concern a horse or a dog suffering similar treatment. And yet I am not evil by nature, and I have never harmed anybody nor shall I probably ever do so. I abhor the whole world in mass, and from among its vast numbers I mark out one or two for my particular hatred. To hate a person involves you in as much worry as love usually does. So, a distinction has to be made by singling him out of the crowd. You have to think of him in the day and to dream of him in the night. You have to bite your pillow and gnash your teeth when you remember his existence. What more does a person do for the one he loves? To please a

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mistress would you take so much trouble and suffer so much worry as you do in the case of a hated enemy? I doubt it, for to hate some one really and effectively, is necessary to love another. A great hatred serves as a counterpoise to a great love; and whom should I hate, I who love nothing?

My hatred is like my love, a confused sentiment which seeks to cling to something and cannot. I have in me a treasure of love and hatred which I do not know how to use and hence it weighs on me terribly. If I fail to find a way to spend them, I shall burst like a bag filled with silver to a breaking point. Oh! if I could only hate some one, if anyone of the stupid fellowmen could only insult me and thereby make my blood boil in my veins and arouse me from my state of dull torpor! If the last heart-beat of an enemy smothered under my feet could thrill my whole being exquisitely and if the smell of his blood could become sweeter to my nostrils than the fragrance of flowers! Oh! how willingly would I renounce love, and how happy should I consider myself!

Tiger's bite, boar's crushing squeeze, elephant's feet crushing the breast, sharp tail of scorpion, milky sap of the euphorbia, wavy Japanese creeses, blades shining in the night and getting dulled in blood—it is all of you who replace for me the rosy leaves, the moist kisses and embraces of love!

I love none, I said. Alas! now I am afraid I am in love with somebody. It would be a hundred thousand times better to hate than to love like that! The type of beauty that I dreamt of so long I have now met. I have discovered the body of my phantom. I have seen it, and we have spoken. I have shaken hands with my chimera, I know perfectly well that I could not be mistaken, and that my presentiments never played me false. Yes, Silvio, I am now very much near to the dream ideal of life. My room is here, hers is just there. From here I can see the curtain of her

window and the light of her lamp. Her shadow has just passed across the curtain ; in an hour we shall meet and dine together.

The lovely Turkish eyelids, the limpid, penetrating glance, the warm colour of pale amber, the long, black shining tresses, the fine, proud nose, the small slender hands and feet, the delicate sinuosities and the oval purity which add so much distinction and aristocratic elegance to a head, in fact, all that which I wanted is there ; all that I should have been happy to find distributed among five or six persons is combined in a single one.

The thing I adore most in the world is a pair of beautiful hands. If only you could see their perfection ! How soft and white is the skin ! How slim and tapering are the fingers ! How neatly the nails are shaped ! They can be only compared to the petals of a rose. The vaunted hands of Anne of Austria, compared with these, would but appear as rough as those of a game-keeper or of a pantry-maid. How artistic and graceful is the slightest movement of such a hand ! The very thought of it is maddening ; my lips burn and tremble with desire. I close my eyes to avoid its sight. But the tips of its delicate fingers seize my eyelashes and lift up the lids and unroll before my mind's eye a myriad visions of ivory and snow.

Ah ! veritably Satan's claw is gloved in this satiny skin. Some playful imp is joking with me. It is nothing short of sorcery. It is too monstrously impossible.

For this hand, I will travel to Italy to study and compare the works of the great masters, yea, I will exert myself to become a painter myself so that I may be able to reproduce it faithfully as it is, as I see it, as I feel it. This would perhaps be the best way to get rid of my obsession. I craved for beauty. But I did not know exactly what it implied. It was like a wish to stare at the sun or to touch a flame. I

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suffer horribly, for I am unable to assimilate such perfection, to pass into it and absorb it into myself, and I fail to find the proper way to reproduce it. When I sight something beautiful, I should desire to touch it with my entire self wholly and completely at one and the same time. I would like to sing its praises and to paint and carve all its lineaments. I want to be loved by it as I love it. I yearn for what cannot and shall never be.

Your letter has hurt me, please pardon me for saying so. All that pure and placid happiness you enjoy, those walks in the woods tinged with the glow of sunset, those long, tender and intimate talks which culminate in a chaste kiss planted on a devoted brow; the serene, detached life; those days so quickly passed that the night seems to you to advance ahead of its time; all this tends to heighten the intensity of the stormy agitations that have been brewing within myself. So you are going to be married within two months; all obstacles have been removed; and now you are certain to be united to each other for ever. Your present happiness augments your forthcoming felicity, you are happy, and you are sure of attaining soon more happiness. What a fine destiny is yours! Your lady love is beautiful. But what you have loved in her is not the mortal, palpable and material beauty; it is the invisible, eternal beauty, the beauty which never grows old, the beauty of the soul. She is full of grace and candour; she loves you as only such souls know how to love. You did not seek to analyse how the gold of her hair resembles that of the beauties of Rubens and Giorgione; but you do love it because it is hers. I would wager, happy as you are, that you do not even care to know whether her type is Greek or Asiatic, English or Italian. O Silvio! how rare are those hearts which are content with pure and simple love, love that neither desires a hermitage in the forest nor a garden on an islet of the lake Maggiore.

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If I had the courage to tear myself away from this spot, I would like to spend a month with you. Perhaps the air you breathe would purify me, perhaps the shade of your avenues would exert a cooling effect on my burning brow. But that is a paradise where my feet cannot tread. It is hardly permitted to me to observe from afar, over the wall, the two beautiful angels walking there hand in hand, gazing into each other's eyes. The demon can enter into Eden only in the form of a serpent, and, my dear Adam! for all the joys of heaven I would not be the serpent of your Eve.

What terrible havoc has been wrought of late in my soul? Who has turned my blood into poison? Monstrous thoughts and images! who has spread your pale green branches in the icy shadows of my heart? What poisonous wind has deposited the germ from which you grew up? So, that is what was in reserve for me, and that is the cruel end of all those roads so desperately traversed! O Destiny! how you play with us! All those eagle's flights towards the sun, those pure flames aspiring to the heavens, that divine sadness, that deep and contented love, that religion of beauty, that imagination so fanciful and elegant, that inexhaustible and ever-intensifying flood of the inner fountain, that ecstasy with full-fledged wings, those dreamings which bloom more exquisitely than the hawthorns in May, all that poetry of my youth, all those gifts so fine and rare, have only served to lower me down to the level of the meanest of men.

I wanted to love. I was like a lunatic, shouting and invoking love. I writhed in rage under the poignant feelings of my own impotence. I set my blood in flames, I dragged my body to the quagmires of sensual pleasures. I have furiously pressed against my dried-up bosom a young and beautiful woman who really loved me. I have run after pleasure, and it has eluded me. I have prostituted myself, and I have acted like a maiden who would prefer to venture



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into a brothel in search of a lover among those driven there by lust, instead of waiting patiently in discreet and quiet obscurity till the divinely appointed angel would appear to me in a radiant effulgence, with a heavenly flower in her hand. All those years I have wasted in puerile agitation, running to and fro with the idea of forcing nature and time. I should have spent those years in solitude and in meditation, qualifying myself for being truly loved. That would have been a wise course. But I had scales over my eyes, and I walked straight towards the precipice. I have already one foot suspended over the abyss and I believe I shall soon lift the other. Resistance seems to be futile and I feel that I must fall headlong into the pit of this chasm which has just yawned before me.

Yes, it is exactly like that I pictured love. Now I feel what I dreamt of. Yes, here is the insomnia, charmingly awful, in which roses appear as thistles and thistles roses. There is really the sweetness of pain and the misery of happiness; there are those blushes, sudden shiverings, that burning but cold perspiration, all that was told by poets is true. They did not lie.

When about to enter the hall where we used to meet, I feel all the symptoms of love described by the poets. My heart beats so violently that the palpitations could almost be seen through my clothes; and I am obliged to compress it with my two hands to prevent it from being broken. If I see my ideal, at the end of an avenue in the park, distance seems to fade away, and I fail to see where the road leads.

The devil must convey one of us, or I must have wings. Nothing can distract me from it. When I read, that image intervenes between the book and my eyes. I am on horseback, but all the while I feel long, silky hair mingling with mine, and the warm breath caressing my cheek. It obsesses

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me, and pursues me everywhere, and I never see it more clearly than when it is not present.

You have pitied me for my incapacity of loving. Pity me now for being in love, and especially for loving the person I am in love with. What a misfortune it is, what a severe blow on my life which has been already shattered! What an insane, criminal and hateful passion has possessed me! The blush of shame which I feel will never disappear from my face. It is the most deplorable of aberrations. I myself fail to comprehend it—everything is confused and blurred. I no longer know who I am or who the others are. I even doubt whether I am woman or man. I have a horror of myself; I experience curious and inexplicable movements within me and at certain moments it seems as if my reason has left me and the consciousness of my existence has abandoned me completely. For a long while I could not bring myself to believe it. I closely observed myself. I tried to unravel the tangled skein which has enmeshed my soul. At last through all these thickening veils I discovered the frightful truth. Silvio, I am in love.... Oh, no! never shall I be able to feel it.... I am in love with a man!

### IX

So, my dear Silvio, I love a man. I have tried so long to delude myself: I have given a different name to the sentiment I feel. I have clothed it in the garb of pure and distinterested friendship. At first I thought it was but my usual admiration for beauty in men and things. I wandered for sometime in the pleasant but treacherous byways which wind about every source of a new passion. But now I have come to recognize the steep and dangerous road on which I have embarked. There is no need to conceal anything; I have examined myself crucially, I have weighed very coldly

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all the circumstances ; I have scanned the minutest details ; I have ransacked my soul in every way possible with that certitude which is derived from a long indulgence in self analysis. I blush at the thought of recording it on paper. The fact is beyond doubt that I love this young man not as a friend, but as a lover. Yes, as a lover !

You whom I have loved so much, Silvio, my good, my only comrade, you have never made me feel any such emotion ; and yet if under heaven there was ever any real friendship, if ever two souls though different, perfectly understood each other, it was our friendship and our twin souls. What fleeting hours have we spent together ! What endless talks we enjoyed, and yet they seemed to end so soon. We had in our hearts for each other that window which Momus wanted to open in the sides of man. How proud I was to claim your friendship, I who was younger than you, I so mad, while you so reasonable !

My feelings for this youth are really astonishingly incredible ; never has a woman stirred me so profoundly. The sound of his clear, silvery voice unnerves me and agitates me in a peculiar manner. My soul veritably hangs upon his lips, like a bee on a flower, to drink in the honey of his speech. I cannot brush against him while walking without being thrilled from head to foot ; and in the evening when we part, as he holds out his soft, satiny hand, all my life wells out towards the spot he has touched, and even an hour later, still feel the pressure of his fingers.

This morning I watched him for a long time without his knowledge. I was hidden behind my curtain. He was standing at his window which was exactly opposite mine. This part of the chateau was built in the closing period of the reign of Henry IV. It is half-brick, half rubble, in accordance with the fashion of the times. The window is long and narrow with a stone balcony. Theodore, for you

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must have undoubtedly guessed it was him, was leaning on the balcony, and appeared to be in a deep reverie. Drapery of red damask with large flowers fell in wide folds behind him and served as a background. How beautiful he looked, and how his dark, pale head stood out prominently. Two large locks of black, shining hair, like the grapes of ancient Arigona, hung gracefully upon his cheeks and enclosed the fine, regular oval of his lovely face. His plump, round neck was completely bare, and she was dressed in a large-sleeved dressing-gown which was rather like a woman's. He held in his hand a yellow tulip which he unconsciously crushed and threw out the fragments to the winds.

One of the luminous angles which the sun was projecting on the wall was right upon the window; and it gilded the picture with a warm, transparent tint of which the brightest picture of Giorgione could be envious.

With those long locks gently stirred by the breeze, the bare, marble neck, with the flowing dressing gown fastened at the waist, with his pretty hands peeping out of the sleeves like a flower's pistils from the midst of its petals, he had the appearance not of a handsome man, but of a most beautiful woman. And I said to myself: "It is a woman, a woman." Then I suddenly recollected the foolish sentence I wrote to you sometime ago—you remember—concerning my ideal and the place where I should most certainly meet her; the beautiful lady in the Louis XIII park, the red and white chateau, large terrace, the avenue of ancient chestnut trees, and the interior at the window: I mentioned all these details. What I see now is indeed the faithful realization of my dream. It was the same style of architecture, the same effect of light and shade, the same type of beauty, the colour and character that I had desired. There was nothing lacking except that the lady turns out to be a man. But I must confess that I had entirely overlooked this fact.

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Theodore must be a woman in disguise ; it cannot be otherwise. Such a beauty, unusual even for a woman, is not the beauty of a man, be he Antinous the friend of Hadrian, or an Alexis the companion of Virgil. Theodore is a woman, and I was very much foolish to be so seriously agitated. Therefore, everything explains it naturally, and I am not the monster as I imagined myself to be.

Would God put silken lashes so long and dark around a man's eyes ? Would he tint with such bright and soft carmine our thick, hairy lips ? Our rough and hard bones can scarcely serve as a covering for such white and delicate flesh ; our skulls are but poor receptacles for such waves of beautiful hair.

O Beauty ! we are created only to love and adore you, our bended knees if we could find you, or else to seek you for ever all the world over if that good fortune is not stowed on us. But to possess you, to be beautiful, that is only the privilege of women and angels. Lovers, poets, painters and sculptors, we are all seeking to erect an altar to you—the lover in his mistress, the poet in his song, the painter in his canvas, the sculptor in his marble. But to our eternal despair, we are unable to make palpable the beauty we perceive within, and we are encased in a body which fails to realize our ideal.

Long time ago, I saw a young man who had robbed me of the form who ought to have been mine. The wretch was exactly as I should have liked myself to be. He had the beauty of my ugliness, and beside him I looked like his rough copy. He was of my height, but slimmer and stronger. His figure resembled mine, but with an elegance and nobility I lacked. His eyes were of the same colour as mine, but they had a brilliant liveliness mine will never possess. His nose had been cast in the same mould as mine, but it seemed to have been given a finishing touch by the chisel of an able

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sculptor. His nostrils were wider and more passionate. There was something heroic in him which is entirely absent in me. It was just as though I had tried to make a perfected, flawless model of myself. I seemed to be the rough copy of an idea of which he was the fair, correct exemplar. When I saw him walk, stop, greet the ladies and sit down with a perfect grace, which is the outcome of beauty and fine and balanced proportions, I was filled with gloomy, melancholy and frightful jealousy, such as must be felt by the clay model which dries and cracks in an obscure corner of the studio, while the noble marble statue, which could not have existed without its aid, stands proudly upon its carved pedestal, and attracts all attention and admiration. Now this fellow was, after all, a more perfected copy of myself, more successfully cast in less wayward bronze which had fitted in with more exactitude into all the crevices of the mould. I considered him very bold to strut about with my form and to put on airs as if he were an original type, while without me Nature would not have even conceived the idea of making him as he was. When the women admired his good looks and his polite manners, I was tempted to get up and declare: 'What a set of fools you are! Why don't you praise me instead, for this man is none but myself. So you need not give him what rightfully belongs to me.' On other occasions I was itching to throttle him and chase his soul out of that body which was mine, and I prowled round him, tightening my lips, with clenched fists like a noble lord who wanders around his castle, meditating on the possible means to cast out a family of beggars who have settled on his ground. This young man, moreover, was stupid, and because of it he was more successful. And sometimes I envied his stupidity more than his looks. What the Gospels say about the poor in spirit is not complete: 'They shall inherit the kingdom of Heaven.' I know nothing

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about that, nor do I care about it. But certainly they shall have the kingdom of this earth; they have money and pretty women, which are the only two desirable prizes in this world. Do you know a man of high intellect who is rich, and a good-hearted man who has a passable mistress? Although Theodore is very handsome, I do not envy him his beauty. I prefer it to be with him rather than with me.

These strange amours, about which there are so many elegies of the classical poets, which surprise us so much that they were almost inconceivable to us, are, in fact, possible and probable. In our translations we substitute the names of women for those of men used in the texts. So, Juvenis becomes Juventia, Alex is transformed into Ianthe. Handsome boys become pretty girls, and in this manner we reconstruct the monstrous seraglio of Catullus, Tibullus, Martial and Virgil. It is a bold attempt which betrays how inadequately we understand the geniuses of old.

I belong to the age of Homer: the world in which I live is not mine, and I fail to understand the society around me. I am as much a pagan as Alcibiades and Phidias. I never went to Golgotha, to gather the passion flowers and the red river that flowed from the side of the Crucified One and forms a belt round the world did not bathe me in its floods. My rebellious body refused to recognize the supremacy of the soul, and my flesh will not admit that it should be chastened. I find the earth as beautiful as heaven, and I consider that perfection of human form is a virtue. Spirituality does not appeal to me. I prefer a statue to a phantom, and the meridian sun to dusky twilight. Three things give me pleasure: gold, marble and purple—brilliance, solidity and colour. My dreams are made of these elements, and all the castles I build in my fanciful imagination are constructed of these materials. Sometimes I have other dreams: visions of long cavalcades of white horses, without

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bridles and trappings, mounted by handsome youths, completely naked, parading on a dark blue ground, like those on the friezes of the Parthenon; or of bands of young maidens crowned with fillets, wearing plaited tunics and holding ivory fans which seem to circle around an immense vase. Never is there any fog or vapour in them, never anything indistinct or floating. My heaven has no clouds, and if there are some, they are solid and carved with a chisel and made of the chips of marble fallen from the statue of Jupiter. Mountains with high peaks indent its edges, and the sun resting upon one of the loftiest heights, opens wide a yellow eye with its gilded, lion-like pupils. The grasshopper sings, the ears of corn rustle; the shade, overpowered and exhausted by heat, contracts and is concentrated at the foot of the trees. Everything shines, glitters and is resplendent. The smallest detail assumes distinctness and is boldly accentuated. Each object takes on a robust form and bold colours. There is no room in it for the soft somnolence of Christian art. That world belongs to me. The stream of my rivers falls in cascades into a carved urn; between the bulrushes green and sonorous like those of the Eurotas, gleams, the round silvery hip of some Naiad with sea-green hair. In this sombre oak forest there passes Diana clad in her interlaced buskins, with her quiver of arrows upon her back and her loosened sling. Behind her follow her pack of hounds and her nymphs with musical names. My pictures are painted in four colours, like those of the primitive artists; and often they are only coloured bas-reliefs, for I love to touch with my finger what I see, and pursue the curving contours to their most secret folds. I scan everything from every angle, and I turn round it with a lantern in my hand. I have looked upon love in the light of the classicists, and as a more or less perfect piece of sculpture. How is the arm? Well enough. Are the hands delicate? What do you think of this foot? I think the



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ankle is not noble enough, and the heel is rather common. But the bosom is well-placed and of fine shape. That sinuous line is appropriately undulating. The shoulders are fleshy and they have a distinctive beauty. This woman would make a fairly tolerable model, and it would be possible to sketch several features of her body. So, let us love her.

I have always been like that. For women I have a sculptor's eye rather than a lover's. All through my life I have been critical of the shape of the flagon rather than of the quality of its contents. If I had Pandora's box in my hands, I think I would perhaps have left it unopened. A little while ago I said that Christ had not come for me. Mary, that star of the modern heaven and mother of the glorious Bambino had not come either.

Long and often I stopped under the stone foliage of cathedrals with stained-glass windows at the time when the organ was quivering by itself, when an invisible finger pressed the keys and the wind blew into the pipes; and I stared closely into the pale azure of the Madonna's eyes. I scrutinized with piety the lean oval of her face, the faint arch of her eyebrows, I admired her luminous forehead, her chastely, transparent temples, her cheekbones tinted with a sober, virginal hue. I have counted one by one the beautiful golden eyelids which cast a palpitating shadow. I have disentangled the fleeting lines of her frail and bending neck. I have even lifted the folds of her tunic and contemplated her blue-veined bosom. Well, I confess all that immaterial beauty, so light and misty that it seems evanescent, only touched me superficially. I prefer Venus Anadyomene a thousand times. Those classical eyes, those lips so pure and finely-chiselled, so amorously provoking, that hair which is undulated like the sea and is knotted carelessly behind the head, those firm and glossy shoulders, that ravishingly meandering back, that small and semi-detached bosom, those

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round and well-proportioned forms, this remarkable display of superhuman prowess in so admirably feminine a body—all these charms enchant me to a degree that you cannot imagine, O you Christian and wise man!

Mary, in spite of her appearance of humility, is much too proud for me. Her feet, swathed in white and light colours, hardly touch the earth where writhes the ancient dragon. Her eyes are, no doubt, most beautiful; but they are always turned towards heaven; never have they served as a mirror to a human soul. And, moreover, I do not like those smiling cherubs which fly round her head in a white circle. Their hands which spring up to her help, their wings flapping to fan her, displease me immensely. Those cherubs of heaven, so coquettish and triumphant, in tunics of light, in golden wigs, with their blue and green plumes, seem to me too gallant; and if I were God, I should keep such page-boys for women of another category.

Venus rises out of the sea to the land, nude and alone. She prefers this earth to Olympus, and would prefer men to Gods. She does not wrap herself in the langourous veils of mysticism, she stands up, her dolphin behind her, her foot on her mother-of-pearl sea-shell; the sun shines on her body, and her white hand raises the waves of her glossy hair in which old father Ocean has sown his choicest gems. Anyone may see her; she has nothing to hide, as modesty is only reserved for ugly women, and is a modern invention and product of Christian abhorrence for form and matter.

O ancient world! All that you have revered is contemptible to-day; your idols are grovelling in the dust. Lean anchorites clad in torn rags, martyrs drenched in blood, with shoulders rent by the sharp claws of tigers in the circus, perched themselves on the pedestals of your beautiful gods. Christ has enveloped the world in his shroud. Beauty has been compelled to blush at herself and cover her naked-

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ness. Handsome youths endowed with fine limbs who fight in the lyceum or gymnasium under the blazing sun of Attica before an astonished audience, you dancing nude maids of Sparta racing up to the peak of Taygetos! don again your dress of tunic and mantles: your reign is over. And you marble carvers, Prometheus of the bronze, break your chisels! There will be no more sculptors. The world of action, the world of joyful living is dead. A gloomy, lugubrious thought alone fills up the immensity of the void. Virginity, the plant of bitterness, product of a land soaked with blood, whose sickly and faded flower opens itself painfully in the shade of cloisters under a cold, purifying rain, rose without perfume and bristling with thorns: you have taken the place of the bright and gay roses bathed in nard and falerne of the dancers of Sybaris.

The ancient world did not know you, O sterile flower. Never were you to be found in a wreath of intoxicating aroma. In this vigorous and healthy society you would have ben just trampled on. Virginity, Mysticism and Melancholia—three unknown words, three ailments introduced by Christianity. Pale spectres who flood our world with your icy tears and who, with your elbow on a cloud and a hand of your chest only know how to mumble: "O Death! O Death!" you could never have set your foot on that earth so well-peopled with indulgent and pleasure-seeking gods. I regard woman, as the ancients did, as a beautiful slave destined for our enjoyment. Christianity has not rehabilitated her in my eyes. She is to me always something different from and inferior to myself, something to be adored and enjoyed, a plaything more intelligent than an ivory or golden toy, which has the capacity to pick itself up if dropped on the ground. I have been often told, because of these remarks, that I think ill of women, but, on the contrary, I consider that I hold a very good opinion of them.

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I fail to understand why women are so anxious to be considered as men. I can imagine a person desiring to be a serpent, lion or an elephant. But it passes my comprehension how anyone can wish to be a man. If I had been present at the Council of Trent when this important question whether a woman was a man was discussed, I should certainly have voted negatively.

I wrote in the past a few amorous verses, at least they pretended to be such. I have just re-read some of them. I discover that the sentiment of modern love is entirely absent from them. If they were written in Latin distiches instead of French rhyme, they could be mistaken for the work of a third-rate poet of the times of Augustus. I am surprised that the women, for whom they were written, were charmed by them instead of getting frantic. It is true that women understand poetry no better than roses or cabbages; and that is quite natural, considering that they themselves are poetry, or at least its best accessories. A flute neither hears nor understands the air played upon it.

In these verses nothing but the gold or ebony of the hair, the miraculous fineness of the skin, the roundness of the arms, the delicate shape of the hand, is mentioned, and they all end in a humble supplication to the divinity to grant the speedy enjoyment of all these beautiful objects.

In the passages of triumph you only read about garlands hung at the threshold, rain of flowers, burning perfumes, Catullian kisses, sleepless and enchanting nights, quarrels with the dawn, with injunctions to the dawn to return to its hiding place behind the saffron curtains of old Tithon. It was brilliant but sober, sonorous without vibrations. The lines are exact and polished, but through all their refinement and veils of expression one hears the sharp, hard voice of the master which he tries to soften when speaking to his slave. It is not, as in the erotic poetry composed since the

Christian era, a soul begging another soul to love because it loves ; it is not a blue and smiling lake inviting a stream to melt itself into its bosom, so that together they may reflect the stars in the sky, it is not a couple of doves opening out their wings at the same time to fly to a common nest.

"Cynthia, you are beautiful ; make haste. Who knows if you will live till to-morrow ? Your locks are darker than the glossy skin of a Ethiopian maiden. Hasten ! a few years hence silver threads will appear in those thick tresses. These roses smell sweetly to-day ; to-morrow they will have the odour of death, and will only be the corpses of flowers. Let us inhale the fragrance of your roses as long as they resemble your cheeks ; let us kiss your cheeks as long as they are like your roses. When you are old, Cynthia, no one will desire you, not even the licitor's servants when you will pay them, and you will run after me whom you are now repelling. Wait till Saturn has dug with his nail into that pure and radiant brow and you will see how your threshold now so much besieged and sprinkled with flowers and warm tears, will be shunned, cursed and overgrown with weeds and brambles. Hasten, Cynthia, the tiniest wrinkle may become the grave of the greatest passion."

It is in this brutally frank and imperious formula that the ancient elegy is summed up. It always returns to that. It is its greatest and strongest reason, the Achilles of its arguments. After that there is little more to be said, and when a robe and necklace of well-matched pearls have been promised, a man is at his wits' end. That, too, is what I find most conclusive in similar circumstances. I do not, however, always strictly adhere to such scanty programme, and I embroider my meagre canvas here and there with a few threads of multi-coloured silks. But these bits are either short or knotted, and badly fastened. I write elegantly about love, because I have read many beautiful essays on the sub-

ject. Only an aptitude for acting is what is needed for this purpose. With many women the appearance is sufficient. The habit of writing and imagining guarantees that I do not run short of ideas, and anybody with a little application will easily obtain the same result. But I never feel a word of what I say and I repeat in low whisper like the ancient poet, "Cynthia, hasten."

I have often been accused of trickery and dissimulation. No one in the world would so much love as I do to speak frankly and unbosom his heart. But I have no single idea or sentiment common with what is held by the people around me. And as the first true word of mine would create an uproar and confusion, I prefer to remain silent. Or else if I speak, I only disgorge the common places I have so often heard from the bourgeoisie. I should soon be in the bad graces of the ladies, if I were to tell them what I have just written to you. I do not think they would appreciate my way of looking at and viewing love. As for men, the best I can say for them is that they ought to walk on all fours, and I can hardly tell them that. I have no desire to raise a quarrel over each word I utter. It matters nothing what I think or what I do not think; whether I am sad when I seem to be gay, or jovial when I seem to be melancholy. Nobody has anything to remark against my being dressed and not naked. Can I not then dress up my face as I do my body? Why should a mask seem more reprehensible than breeches, and a lie than a pair of corsets?

Alas! the earth revolves round the sun roasted on one side and frozen on the other. There is a battle now being fought in which six hundred thousand combatants are tearing up one another. Still the weather is very fine, and flowers are as coquettish as ever; they boldly open their luxuriant bosoms until crushed under horse's hoofs. To-day a fabulous number of good actions have been performed.

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Yet it is raining like a deluge, accompanied by snow, thunder, lightning and hailstorms. It seems as if the end of the world is approaching; the benefactors of humanity are splashed with mud up to their waists, like dogs, unless they have a carriage. Creation ruthlessly scoffs at the creature, and stings it all the time with deadly sarcasms. Everyone is indifferent to the other, and each thing lives or vegetates by its own laws. What does it matter to the sun, to the beetroots or even to men whether I do this or that, live or die, suffer or enjoy, be frank or deceitful? A blade of straw has fallen on an ant and broken its third paw at its second joint; a rock has crashed on a village and destroyed it. And I do not believe that one of these accidents draws more tears than the other from the golden eyes of the stars. You are my best friend, if that phrase is not as hollow as the inside of a bell. But when I die, it goes without saying that you would not care to go without your dinner even for two days. But is there any of my friends or mistresses who will remember my name twenty years hence and will recognize me in the street, if I pass by them in tattered garments. Oblivion and vanity of vanities, that makes up all men.

I feel as perfectly alone as it is possible to be, and all the threads connecting me with other persons and objects have been snapped one by one. There are very few instances of a man who, having preserved a knowledge of the movements taking place within himself, has reached such a state of brutishness as mine. I may be compared to one of those flasks of liqueurs, which has been left open, and hence the strength of its contents has totally evaporated. The liquid preserves the same colour and appearance, but on tasting it you will find it as insipid as water.

When I think seriously about it, I am horrified at the rapidity of this process of decomposition. If it continues unabated, I must have to be salted, or else I shall inevitably

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rot, and the worms will grow into my bones since I have lost my soul which only differentiates a body from the corpse. Not more than a year ago I had still something human about me. I bestirred myself, I was seeking for something, I was cherishing one thought more than all the others, a sort of aim, an ideal. I desired to be loved, I dreamed the dreams natural to that age, less nebulous and chaste, it is true, than those of a normal youth but still confined within reasonable limits. Slowly all that was not physical or material in me evaporated and vanished, and there only remained at the bottom a thick layer of slime. The dream became a nightmare, and the chimera a succubus. The spiritual world has barred its ivory gates on my face. I only realize now what I touch with my own hands. My dreams are as hard as stone. Everything round me is condensed and has become a solid, impenetrable mass. Nothing floats or wavers; there is no air, no breath; matter oppresses, overwhelms and crushes me. I am like a pilgrim who one summer morning fell asleep with his feet in the river and awoke in the winter to find them submerged in ice. I no longer desire the love or friendship of anyone; even glory, that luminous halo I used to aspire so much for my brow, has ceased to inspire in me any desire. There is, alas, now but one desire which agitates me, the terrible passion which transport me to Theodore. To this level have all my notions of morality have sunk; that which is physically beautiful is good, but everything which is ugly is evil. If I see a lovely woman who is known to have a very evil soul, perhaps an adultress who will not shirk from administering poison, I must admit I could gladly enjoy her company provided the shape of her nose were agreeably comely.

This is my picture of supreme happiness. It is a great mansion, without any windows; a large courtyard surrounded by a colonnade of white marble having a crystal



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fountain in the centre, with a quicksilver stream after the Arabian style; and groves of orange trees and pomegranates, placed alternately, stand beneath the blue canopy of an azure sky in the golden sunlight. Big grey hounds with painted noses sleep there; from time to time bare-footed negroes with golden circlets round their ankles, and maid-servants, pretty, white and slender, attired in rich fancy-dress, pass between the arches with baskets in their arms or pitchers on their heads. I sit reclining motionless and silent beneath a magnificent dais surrounded by piles of cushions, with a great tame lion at my elbow and the bare bosom of a young slave under my feet as my foot-stool as I smoke opium from a large jade pipe.

I do not portray paradise otherwise and if it be God's will that I go there after death, He will have built for me in a corner of some star a little kiosk after the pattern I have described. Paradise, as it is usually depicted, seems to me much too musical, and I confess in all humility that I am absolutely incapable of enduring a sonata played for the last ten thousand years.

You see what my Eldorado, my promised land is like. It is a dream like everything else; but there is one special feature in it, that I never introduce any familiar figure into it. None of my friends has ever entered the portals of this imaginary palace; no woman whom I ever loved has ever found any place by my side on its velvet cushions. I reign supremely alone in the midst of shadows. I have never had the slightest thought of loving any of the beautiful women, and graceful young girls that are permitted to inhabit this fancied mansion; and I have never supposed them to be in love with me. In this strange seraglio I have selected no favourite Sultana. There are negresses, mulattos, Jewesses with blue skins and red hair; Greeks and Circassians, Spaniards and English women. But they only

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serve as symbols of colour and line ; and I have them just as a man keeps all varieties of wine in his cellar and all kinds of humming birds in his aviary. They are in fact, machines for pleasure, frameless pictures, statues which can move in all directions according to the whim of their master. A woman enjoys this incomparable advantage over a statue : she can turn of her own accord in any desired direction, while a statue has to be turned and placed by yourself at the proper angle. And this is tiresome.

You can see that with such ideas in my head it is not possible for me to remain in harmony with the present world in this century, for a man cannot subsist like that outside time and space. I must discover some other way.

Thinking in this light, such a conclusion appears to be simple and logical when the perfection of form and the purity of line are sought to please the eye, they are welcomed wherever they are met. That explains the strange aberrations of classical love.

Since Christ no single statue of man has been created in which youthful beauty has been idealized and reproduced with that peculiar care which characterized the ancient sculptors. Woman has become the symbol of moral and physical beauty ; since that day man's decadence has really set in. Woman is the queen of creation ; stars unite to form a crown for her head, the crescent of the moon is proud of its privilege to act as a circle beneath her feet, the sun yields up its purest gold to fashion her jewels, painters desirous of flattering the angels endow them with women's faces, and surely I am not the man to blame them. Before the Christian era, it was a different story. The gods or heroes whom artists wanted to appear seductive, were not feminized: they had a type, vigorous at once delicate, but always masculine, however voluptuous were their contours, however smooth and devoid of muscles were their legs and arms.

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Female beauty is more easily adapted to these characteristics. The shoulders are broadened, the hips made slimmer, the breasts more protruding, while the joints of the arms and thighs are more strongly accentuated. There was hardly any difference between Paris and Helen. In this way the hermaphrodite is one of the most ardently caressed chimeras of ancient idolatry.

This son of Hermes and Aphrodite is one of the most enchanting creations of pagan genius. Nothing more ravishing can be imagined than the harmonious blending of two such perfect bodies, of these two beauties so similar and yet so different, to form one being superior to both, because they soften each other's angularities and each emphasizes the other's beauty. To a discriminating lover of form is there any more pleasing uncertainty than that into which he is thrown by the sight of that back, those lovely thighs and those fine, strong legs which he hardly knows whether to attribute to Mercury ready for flight or Diana emerging from her bath? The torso is a combination of the most charming monstrosities. To the full and fleshy chest of the youth with strange grace the round breast of a young virgin is attached. All the aspects of the body have something indefinite that could not be reproduced, but they command a strange attraction. Theodore would certainly be an excellent model for that type of beauty, though I think the feminine grace has the greater share in him.

The curious fact is that I just love him with perfect security without thinking any longer about his sex. Sometimes I try to persuade myself that this love is abominable, and I use the most severely critical expression against myself; but that only comes from my lips. It is an accusation which I fabricate myself, without sincerely believing its truth. It seems to me that my love is the most natural thing in the world, and that anyone else in my place would do the same.

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I see him and I listen to him talking or singing, for he sings admirably ; and I derive an inexpressible pleasure from so doing. He gives me so much an impression that he is a woman that one day in the heat of conversation I involuntarily addressed him as "Madam." That made him laugh, but it seemed to be a forced laughter.

If he is a woman by any chance, what can be her reasons for masquerading so? I cannot offer any explanation. For a handsome and beardless youth to disguise himself as a woman is conceivable; for it opens to him a thousand gates which would otherwise remain closed to him, and it may lead him into a maze of delightfully complicated adventures. Thus a closely guarded woman can be approached, and the result of her surprise may contribute to the young man's happiness. But I do not know how it serves a beautiful woman to run about the countryside dressed as a man. She can only lose by this conduct. A woman must in these circumstances renounce the pleasure of being courted, serenaded and adored; she would rather forfeit her life, and she would be right, for what is a woman's life without that? Nothing, or something worse than death. I always wonder why women, when they reach the age of thirty or who are disfigured by small-pox do not throw themselves down from the top of a tower.

In spite of it all something stronger than all arguments cries out to me that Theodore is a woman, the woman of my dreams, she whom I am to love exclusively and who shall love me only. Yes, it is she, the goddess with the glance of an eagle, and the beautiful regal hands, who was smiling benignantly on me from her high throne in the clouds. She has presented herself to me in this disguise to try me, to see if I could recognize her, if my amorous glance would penetrate the veil in which she has wrapped herself, just as in those nursery tales the fairies first appear in the guise of

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beggars and then suddenly rise up again resplendent in gold and precious gems.

I have recognized you, my love! At the sight of you my heart leapt in my breast; a brilliant light appeared in the heavens. I smelt the fragrance of divine ambrosia, I saw the trail of fire under your feet, and I at once realized that you were not an ordinary mortal.

St. Cecily's melodious music to which angels listened with rapture is harsh and discordant in comparison with the pearly cadences that fall from your ruby mouth; the Graces, youthful and smiling, dance round you in a perpetual rhythm. When you ramble in the woods, birds incline their small happy heads to see you and warble their best songs to welcome you. The magic moon rises earlier to kiss you with her silvery lips. The wind refrains from effacing the delicate imprint of your footsteps on the sands. The stream over which you lean keeps its surface more crystalline to avoid deforming the reflexion of your heavenly face in its ripples. The bashful violets themselves open to you their little hearts and entertain you with a thousand coqueties. The jealous strawberry, feeling disgraced, tries to emulate the rosy tints of your mouth. The tiny gnats buzz around you and beat their wings in adoration of you. All nature loves and admires you, her finest creation.

Ah! I see it all now. Uptil now I was but a dead man. Now I am rid of my shroud, and hold out of my tomb my two lean hands towards the sun. My blue, spectral colour has left me. My blood flows freely and rapidly through my veins. The terrible silence that reigned around me is at last broken. The grim, opaque vault which weighed heavily upon my brow is illuminated. A myriad mysterious voices whisper in my ears. Beautiful stars twinkle above me and light up with their golden rays my tortuous path. Daisies sweetly laugh at me, and the bells murmur my name with

their twisted tongues. I now come to understand a number of things I never realized before. I discover marvellous sympathies and affinities. The language of the roses and nightingales has no secret for me, and I can now read with ease the book which I could not even spell. I have found a friend in the ancient oak covered with mistletoe and other parasite plants; and the frail and languorous periwinkle with its great blue tearful eyes has for a long while cherished for me a discreet and restrained passion. It is love that has opened my eyes and solved my enigma. Love has descended to the bottom of the vault where my soul lay benumbed and somnolent; it has guided it by the hand up the steep and narrow steps leading out to the light of day. All the doors of the prison-house have opened, and for the first time this poor psyche has been released from her thralldom.

My life has now taken a new turn. I breathe through the lungs of another, and the blow which wounds him will kill me. Until this happy day I was like one of those grim Japanese idols which have their eyes fixed eternally upon their belly. I was but a spectator of myself, the sole audience of the comedy I was playing. I looked at myself and listened to my heart beats as the pendulum of a clock. That is all. Images appeared to my unseeing eyes; sounds struck my inattentive ears. But nothing from the outside world reached my soul. I even doubted whether there was any other existence than mine; and I am hardly convinced yet. It seemed to me that I was alone in the midst of the universe, and that all the rest was only shadowy images, vain illusions, fugitive apparitions destined to people this void. Now what a difference!

And yet if my presentiment were wrong, if Theodore is really a man as the world believes him to be! Such marvellous beauty as he possesses can sometimes be seen. Youth lends itself to this illusion. But such a possibility I

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cannot think of, for it will drive me mad. This seed which yesterday fell upon the sterile rock of my heart has already sent forth thousands of its filaments. It has taken deep root and is now impossible to pluck out. It is already a green tree in full bloom with strong, twisted roots. Even if I were to know it for certain that Theodore is not a woman, alas ! I am not sure whether I would not love him still.

My fair friend, you were quite right in trying to dissuade me from my proposed plan to observe and study men closely and thoroughly before giving my heart to anyone of them. All love has for ever extinguished in me, and even the possibility of loving has ceased to exist.

Poor, helpless girls we are; brought up with so much care, so chastely protected by a triple wall of precautions and reticences, permitted to hear or suspect nothing, while our chief accomplishment is to know nothing. In what a strange atmosphere of unnatural falsehoods do we live! and what impossible, fantastic day-dreams do we indulge in!

Ah! Graciosa, thrice cursed be that moment when I conceived the idea of assuming this disguise. What horrors, infamy and vulgarity I have been forced to witness or to hear! What a treasure of chaste and precious ignorance I have dissipated in so short a time!

It was a beautiful moonlight night, do you remember ? We were walking in the garden through that dark and unfrequented lane with a statue of faun playing the flute (the statue had lost its nose, and was covered with a thick black moss) at one end, and at the other an artificial view painted on the wall, which had been partially effaced by the rain. The stars and the silvery sickle could be seen through the thin foliage of the grove. A smell of young shoots and fresh plants came over us from the flower-beds on the wings of a mild breeze. A bird from its hiding whistled a quaint and

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languorous note. We, as usual with the girls of our age, talked of love, suitors, marriage and of the handsome men we had seen at Mass. We exchanged our insufficient and scanty ideas of the world and we turned over in a hundred different ways a phrase we have overheard, but the meaning of which was not clear to us. We asked each other the thousand absurd questions which perfect ignorance alone could prompt. What primitive poetry, what amiable nonsense in those furtive talks between two little innocents just out of the girls' boarding school!

You desired as a lover a brave and proud young man with black hair and moustache, large spurs, great plumes, and a mighty sword, in fact a sort of a warlike lover; and you gave way to heroic imagination. You only dreamt of duels, escalades, and knightly devotion. And you would gladly have cast off your glove into the lion's den, so that your cavalier might recover it for you. It was very much comic to see a little girl as you then were, blonde, blushing, and fragile, uttering such noble heroics volubly with the most militant air!

Though I was but six months older than you, I was six years less romantic. Only one thing puzzled me very much—that was to know what men used to converse with one another and what they did when they left the receptions or theatres. I guessed many defects and obscurities in their life, carefully veiled from our ken and which it was very important for us to gauge. Sometimes, concealed behind a curtain, I spied from a distance upon the men who came to our house; and detected something ignoble and cynical mixed up with their attractive manners; and there was in them a gross abandon and dangerous obsession which they totally got rid of as soon as they reached our doorstep. All of them, whether young or old, appeared to have uni-



formly put on the mask of convention—convention in feelings and in speech—when they were in presence of women. From the corner of the drawing-room where I was seated, I, without leaning back on my seat, twisting my bouquet in my fingers, listened and watched. My eyes were lowered, but still I could see all that was going on to the right and left, before and behind me. Like the mythical eyes of the lynx, mine could penetrate through the walls, and I could have told all that was happening in the next room. I also noticed a remarkable difference in their treatment of married women. Polite and discreet phrases, like those addressed to myself and my companions, were not used; but a more free and familiar manner was adopted. There was more sprightliness, and less sobriety; there were reticences full of meaning, and veiled reference to the facts of life. I realized that between them there was a common element which was absent between us, and I would have given anything to know what that element was.

With what anxiety and curious fury did I follow with eye and ear the laughing groups of young people who exchanged ambiguous glances as they strolled about. Incredulous sneers were evident on their disdainful lips; they seemed to be mocking at whatever they had just said, and they seemed to retract the compliments and adulation they had just bestowed on us profusely. I could not hear them speak, but I could make out from the movements of their lips that they were using a language unknown to me, and which was never used in my presence. Even those who had the most modest and submissive air raised their heads with a very pronounced sign of revolt and boredom; a breathless sigh like that of an actor who has just come to the end of a lengthy soliloquy unwittingly escaped them; and when they left our company, they made a half-turn on the heel in a quick and hurried fashion which betrayed in-

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ward satisfaction at being relieved of their onerous obligation of being honourable and polite with us.

I would have given a year of my life to have heard, unseen, their conversation for an hour. Often it became clear to me, judging from certain attitudes, gestures and oblique glances, that I myself was being discussed by them with reference to my age or general apperance. Then I was upon tenterhooks. The few indistinct words, the few scraps of a phrase which reached my ears at intervals excited my curiosity to its highest pitch. Without being able to satisfy it, I became a prey to strange doubt and perplexities.

Very often the remarks seemed to be complimentary; and they did not naturally cause me to worry. I cared very little whether I was considered beautiful. But the observations whispered in the ear, and invariably followed by long titters and winks were what I should have longed very much to overhear; and for one of thoes phrases uttered in an undertone behind a curtain or in a doorway, I would have sacrificed without the slightest regret the most flowery and perfumed conversation.

If I had a lover, I should have been delighted to know how he spoke of me to other men, and in what terms he would have boasted of his good fortune to his boon-companions with a little wine up in his head and his elbows upon the table-cloth. Now I know, and I regret this knowledge. It is always so.

My idea was rather crazy, but what is done is done, and I cannot unlearn what I have learnt. I repent for not having listened to your advice, my dear Graciosa. But one does not always defer to reason, especially when it comes from such a pretty mouth as yours, for—and I do not know why—one cannot regard any advice wise unless it is given by an old greybeard. Just as if being consistently stupid for sixty years should make a man wiser.

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But that desire tortured me acutely, and I could not stand it any longer. I burnt inside like a chestnut on the frying pan. The fatal apple was suspending in the branches above my head, and in the end I have to bite it, though knowing well that I have to throw it away afterwards if it tastes bitter. I did as the fair Eve, my dear grandmother did. I bit a piece of it.

The death of my uncle, my only surviving relative, having left me absolutely free to act as I wished, I put into execution the plan on which I had so long meditated. I had taken every possible precaution so that none could suspect my real sex! I had learnt to shoot and fence. I could ride with perfect skill, and with a dash of which few masters were capable. I studied the niceties of dressing like a man, and in a few months I succeeded in transforming a pretty girl into a much finer cavalier who lack only in one thing, a moustache. I put together all my resources and left the town, determined not to come back until I had gained the fullest experience.

It was the only way to set at rest all my doubts. Lovers could have taught me nothing, or at least they could only help me in acquiring incomplete knowledge. And I wanted to study man thoroughly, to dissect him fibre by fibre with an inexorable scalpel and to hold him alive and palpitating on my operating table; for that it was necessary to see him alone in his house, undressed, and to follow him in his walks and in his orgies at the tavern and elsewhere. Thanks to my disguise, I could go everywhere without being detected. Nothing was hidden from me; all constraint and reserve were put aside. I received confidences, and made false ones to invite the true. Alas! woman! You have only read man's romance, not his history!

It is a dreadful thing to reflect how profoundly ignorant we are of the life and conduct of those who appear to love

us and whom we marry. Their real lives are so completely unknown to us as if they were the inhabitants of Saturn, or of some other planet, a hundred million miles away from our sphere. They seem to belong to another species, and there is not the faintest intellectual affinity between the two sexes. The virtues of the one make the vices of the other ; and what makes the man admired redounds to the discredit of the woman. Our life is clear and can be seen at a glance. It is easy to follow us from the home to the boarding school and the way back. There is nothing mysterious in our doings. Everybody can see our ugly drawings, our water-colour, bouquets made of a pansy and a rose as big as a cabbage and badly fastened by their stems with a ribbon of tender hue. The slippers we embroider on our father's or grandfather's birth-days have no occult element in them.

Our sonatas and romances are executed with all desirable coldness. We are duly well tied to our mother's apron-strings, and by nine or ten in the evening we retire to our little milk-white beds in our clean and discreet chambers wherein we are virtuously bolted and locked up till the next morning. The most wide-awake and jealous susceptibility would find no flaw in that.

Even the clearest crystal is not so transparent as such a life.

The man who takes us knows everything we did from the moment we were weaned and even before, even if he wants to carry his inquiries so far back. Our life is not a life ; we simply vegetate like moss or flowers. The glacial shadow of the material stem overhangs us ; we are but poor rose-buds, too timid to open ourselves out. Our main pre-occupation is to hold ourselves very upright, to be well-corsetted, to keep our eyes discreetly lowered, and to surpass in immobility all dummies and spring dolls.

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We are forbidden to enter into any conversation except by answering 'yes' or 'no' when we are asked. The moment the talk becomes interesting, we are sent away to practise on our harp, and our music-teachers are hardly under sixty, who are horribly addicted to snuff. The models hung up on our walls are very vague and elusive in their anatomy. Grecian gods, before being introduced in our boarding-schools, are required to buy from second-hand shops some very large mantles and to get themselves drawn in dotted lines, which give them the appearance of gate-keepers or cabmen, and renders them incapable of kindling our imagination.

So much effort is made to nip in the bud any romantic idea in us that we are turned into idiots. Our days in the school are spent not in teaching us anything, but in preventing us from learning.

We are really prisoners in body and in mind. But take the case of a young man; he is free to do anything; he goes out in the morning only to return till the next; he has enough money at his disposal; he can earn and spend it as he pleases; how could he justify his way of spending the time? Where is that man who would tell his beloved what he has done during the day and the night? None. Even those reputed as the best would not do it.

I had sent my horse and my clothes to a small farm of mine, a little far from the town. I dressed myself, mounted my horse and started, not without a certain nervousness, I had no regrets; I left nothing behind, neither relations nor friends, not a dog nor a cat, and yet I was sad. I almost had tears in my eyes. This farm which I had visited not more than five or six times, held nothing dear to me to excite my emotions. Yet I turned back two or three times to watch from a distance the blue smoke from its chimney rising between the trees. But it was the place where, with my

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dress and shirts, I had left my title of womanhood. Into the room where I had dressed were crowded twenty years of my life which no longer counted, and ceased to belong to me. On the door one could have written : "Here lies Madelaine de Maupin," for really I was no longer Madelaine de Maupin, but Theodore de Serannes, and no one would again call me by the sweet name, Madelaine.

The drawer to which my old and useless clothes were consigned appeared to me as the coffin of my young illusions; I was now a man, or at least I disguised myself as a man. The young girl that I had been was now dead.

When the tops of the chestnut trees around the farm were out of sight, it seemed to me that I was no longer myself, but some one else ; and I remember my former actions as if they were the acts of a stranger at which I was present; or like the first pages of a romance the last chapters of which I had not read.

I recalled a thousand petty details, the childish naivete of which brought a mocking and indulgent smile to my lips very much like that of a young libertine as he listened to the arcadian and pastoral confidences of a third-form school-girl. At the moment I was for ever severing myself, all my actions of childhood and youth seemed to be running along by the roadside, making so many gestures of friendliness and blowing kisses to me from the tips of their slender white fingers. I spurred on my horse to run away from these upsetting emotions. The trees were flying fast backward on either side, but I still seemed to hear my name being called out from the road-side, "Madelaine, Madelaine." I struck the neck of my mount with the whip, and she redoubled her speed. My hair was flying straight behind my head. My cape was lifted to a horizontal position as if its folds had been carved in stone, so fast was my gallop.

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Once I glanced backward and saw the dust raised by my horse's hoofs far away, like a white mist.

I stopped a while.

In a sweet briar bush on the brink of the road, I saw something white moving about, and heard a small, clear voice, soft as silver, whispering to me: "Madelaine, Madelaine! How far are you going? I am the sprit of your maidenhood, dear child; that is why I am crowned in white, and I am fair in complexion. But why are you wearing riding boots, Madelaine? Your feet look so pretty. Riding-boots and clothes, and plumed hat of a warrior going to fight! Why is this long sword that is bruising your thigh? Your equipment is very odd; Madelaine; and really I do not know if I should accompany you."

"If you feel afraid, my dear, go back home to water my flowers, and look after my doves. But in fact you are wrong. I would be safer in these manly garments than in your gauze and linen. Thanks to my boots nobody can see that my feet are pretty. This sword is to defend myself, and the plume on my hat serves to scare away the nightingales who would come to sing to me songs of love."

I went on my way. In the sighs of the breeze I seemed to recognize the last sentence of the sonata that I had learnt on the occasion of my uncle's birthday; and by a large rose that lifted its head above a wall, I was reminded of the model from which I had made so many water-colour etchings. As I passed by a house, I saw, hanging at a window, the phantom of one of my own curtains. All my past seemed to cling to me to prevent me from going forward towards a new future.

I hesitated two or three times, and then I turned my horse's head in the opposite direction.

But curiosity whispered its soft, insidious words in my ear, "Go on, Theodore! This is a good opportunity to gain

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new experience. If you do not learn to-day you never will. Then, too, you will give your noble heart away to the first comer who may masquerade as an honourable man of warm passions. Men conceal extraordinary secrets from us, Theodore."

I resumed my gallop. The horseman's breeches, though displaying my masculine garb, could not influence my spirits. I felt some vague uneasiness and a tremor of fear—to put it correctly—at a dark corner of the forest. The report of a poacher's gun nearly made me faint. If it had been a thief, the pistols in my holsters and my formidable sword would not have been of much use to me. But gradually, I learnt to harden myself and I began to brush aside my fears.

The sun was slowly declining behind the horizon like the lights in a theatre when the play is over. Hares and pheasants crossed my way from time to time. The shadows lengthened, and distant objects assumed a rosy tint. The sky put on variegated colours, from a soft lilac shade to the lemon and orange tint. The night birds began to sing, and an orchestra of quaint sounds issued forth from the woods. The lingering light faded away, and darkness became complete, emphasized as it was by the shadows of the trees. I who had never gone out alone at night, was now riding alone in the heart of a great forest at eight o'clock at night! Imagine it, Graciosa, I who nearly died of fright while walking in the environs of my garden! Fear seized me again, and my heart beat terribly. It was, I must admit, a great relief when I sighted the lights of the town I was bound for. As soon as I saw those faint rays of the lights like tiny twinkling stars, my fear vanished completely. It seemed to me that these lights were the sympathetic eyes of so many friends watching over my steps.

My horse was no less pleased than I was, and smelling an odour of the stables—which was sweeter to him than all



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the daisies and strawberries—he ran straight to the inn, Lion Rouge.

A white light shone through the windows of the inn. I left my horse in charge of a groom, and entered the kitchen.

An enormous fire-place opened at the back its red and black jaws which swallowed a faggot at each mouthful; and on either side of the hearth, two huge dogs, as big as men, were warming themselves with the greatest unconcern, only raising their paws a little and uttering a sort of sigh when the heat became too intense. Most certainly they would rather have been burnt to cinders than retiring a step.

My presence did not seem to please them, and in vain I caressed their heads in the hope of making friends with them. They looked at me in a way which boded no good. That surprised me, for animals usually come to me of their own accord.

The innkeeper came to enquire what I would have for supper. He was a big, burly fellow with a red nose, uneven eyes, and a broad smile. At each word he uttered, he displayed a double row of pointed teeth, set far apart, like those of an ogre. The large kitchen knife which hung by his side had a dubious look; it seemed as if it could be used for various purposes. After hearing my orders, he gave a kick to one of the dogs, which made him jump and get into a wheel; the dog, while going away, cast a reproachful glance at me. At last, seeing there was no hope for respite, he began to turn the wheel, thereby setting in motion the machine on which the fowl destined for my supper was impaled. I decided to reward the dog for his trouble by throwing out bits of the roasted fowl. While waiting for my supper, I had a look round the kitchen.

Large oak joists supported the ceiling, which was blistered and blackened by the smoke from the fireplace and the

candles. On the side-boards pewter dishes whiter than silver shone in the shadow along with the white china crockery decorated with flowers. Along the walls were long rows of clean saucepans, not unlike the ancient shields which used to hang along the sides of the Greek trireme. (Forgive me, Graciosa, for the epic magnificence of this comparison). One or two bulky maids moved around a large table and arranged crockery, knives and forks, producing a music most pleasing to the hungry, for then the stomach hears more keenly than the ear. On the whole, in spite of the innkeeper's sinister and unattractive appearance, the inn had an honest and cheerful look. In the meantime it was raining; and the rain was beating against the window-panes and the wind howled so furiously that the traveller's latent desire to leave the inn totally withered away; for I know nothing more mournful than such howling sounds in a dark and stormy night.

A thought came to me which made me smile. It was that no one in the world would ever come to seek me here. Really who could have ever suspected that little Madelaine, instead of lying asleep on her warm bed with an alabaster night-lamp by her side, a novel under her pillow and her chambermaid in the next room ready to run to her aid at the slightest sound, was now sitting upon a straw chair in a country inn twenty leagues away from home, with her boots resting on the fireside and her little hands buried in her pockets?

Yes, Madelaine did not remain, like her school-fellows, with her elbows idly resting on the balcony between the convolulus and the jasmine, gazing over the plain at the violet fringes of the horizon, or at some little rose-tinted cloud wafted by the breeze. She has not built in her imagination any castle to entertain her chimera, nor has she like you fair dreamers, clothed an imaginary, hollow phantom of a human being with every sort of perfection. She wanted to

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know men before giving herself to a man. She left everything, her beautiful dresses of bright coloured velvets and silk, her necklaces and bracelets, her birds and flowers. She has voluntarily renounced adoration, gallantry, bouquets and madrigals, even the pleasure of being judged more lovely and better dressed than yourself, her sweet womanly name even, everything that was hers; and she has courageously went away alone to the wide world to acquire a knowledge of life.

If it were known, people would say, Madelaine was mad. You said so yourself, my dear Graciosa; but the really mad women are those who cast their souls away to the wind, and sow their love haphazard upon rocks and stone without knowing if even a single seed will take root.

O Graciosa! this is a thought which invariably caused a creeping terror over me—to love someone who is unworthy of me. It means that I will have to lay bare my soul to his impure eyes and to permit an infidel to profane the sanctuary of my heart, to mingle even for a while my limpid waters with his turbid stream! However arduous the purging may be, something of the slime will surely remain, and I shall never recover my pristine purity.

To think that a man has kissed you and touched you, that he has seen your body, that he can say—"She is like this; she has such a mark at a certain part of her body; she has such a taint in her soul; she laughs over this, she cries over that; here in my wallet is a feather from her chimera's wings; this ring is made of her plaited hair; a fragment of her heart is folded in this letter; she caressed me thus; here is her usual love-greeting."

Ah! Cleopatra, I now understand why you put to death every morning your lover of the night. Unparalleled cruelty it seemed, and I could not curse you too vehemently! Great goddess of voluptuous passion! how deep was your knowledge

of human nature, and how exquisitely fine was your barbarity. You would not allow any human being to divulge the mysteries of your bed; those charming words of love uttered by your lips were never to be repeated. And so you preserved the purity of your illusion. Experience could not despoil anything of the alluring phantasm that you had nursed in your arms. You preferred to be separated from your lovers by the prompt stroke of the axe than by a slow disgust. What a torture it must be to see the man of your choice playing false to the opinion you had formed of him, to discover in his character a thousand unsuspected meannesses to perceive that the object which had appeared so beautiful through the prism of love was really very ugly, and that the man whom you had mistaken for a genuine hero of romance was only just a prosaic commoner, wearing slippers and a dressing gown!

I do not possess Cleopatra's power and authority; and if I had it, I would assuredly not have the strength to use it, as I am neither able nor willing to cut off the heads of my lovers when they leave my bed, and as I am reluctant to bear what other women endure, therefore I must of necessity think twice before accepting a lover. And I should think rather three times if I feel so inclined, though I doubt it very much, after what I have seen and heard, unless I happen to meet in some blessed, unknown country a heart like my own, as they say in novels, a heart virginal and pure that was never loved but is capable of love in the real sense of the term. But this is certainly not an easy thing to find.

Several gentlemen entered the inn, as the storm and the darkness of night prevented them from continuing their journey. They were all young, the oldest being certainly not more than thirty. Their clothes proclaimed that they belonged to the upper classes and so did their insolent manners. One or two of them had interesting faces, while the others

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had, in a more or less marked degree, that sort of brutal joviality and care-free *bonhomie* which men display among themselves, but which they throw off when they are in our presence.

If they had suspected by any chance that the frail young man dozing in his chair was but a young maiden (a dish fit for a prince, as they say) certainly they would have changed their tone, they would have swaggered and put on exaggerated airs. They would have approached you with all elaborate politeness, their legs straightened up, their elbows squared, a smile in their eyes, on their lips, in fact all over their body; they would have uttered the choicest and laboured phrases of velvet and satin. At the slightest movement on my part, they would have seemed to be ready to stretch themselves on the ground like carpets, lest my delicate feet would be hurt by the roughness of the floor. Their hands would come forward to support me; the most comfortable seat would have been offered to me. But I was looking like a handsome boy, not a pretty girl.

I confess I almost regretted my skirts when I saw how little attention I received from them. I was, for a moment, very much mortified. From time to time, I forgot that I was dressed in a man's disguise.

I was sitting there in silence, with arms crossed, thinking occasionally of the fowl which was being roasted for me and of the poor dog I had disturbed so rudely.

The youngest of the party slapped me in the shoulder, hurting me a little, and I uttered an involuntary cry. He asked me if I would not prefer to sup with them rather than alone, since one would drink more and in better spirits in a party. I replied that it would be a pleasure I had not dared to expect, and that I would gladly do so. The supper was laid on one table, and we took our seats round it.

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The panting dog, after lapping up a bowl of water, resumed his old position next to the other dog, which remained still as if it had been carved out of stone, luckily nobody else had ordered for a chicken.

From their incidental remarks I understood that they were bound for the Court which was then at . . . , where they were to join other friends. I told them I was a young scholar just out of the University, returning to my relatives in the country by the student's usual route which was generally the most interesting journey, in spite of its being long and round about. That made them laugh, and after remarking on my innocent and candid looks they enquired whether I had a mistress. I replied I did not really know, and they laughed all the more. The glasses followed one another in rapid succession. Although I had taken care to keep my glass always full, I could not help being a little excited. And never losing sight of my pet idea, I managed to have the conversation confined to the topic of women. It was not a difficult matter, for next to theology and aesthetics, it is the favourite subject for discussion with men when they are drunk.

These men were not exactly intoxicated, for they could stand their wine too well for that ; but they started endless discussions on morals, with their elbows unceremoniously placed on the table. One of them passed his arm round the ample waist of one of the maids, and fondled her amorously. Another swore that he would burst out then and there like a stuffed toad, if she did not allow him to kiss her fat, ruddy cheeks. And Jeanette gave way with a good grace, and did not even mind when a hand audaciously slipped between the folds of her shawl into the moist valley of her breasts, poorly protected by a little gold cross ; and it was only after a brief whisper that he let her remove the dishes.

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Yet they were fashionable, elegant young men; and unless I had actually seen it, I could never have accused them of such liberties with maids of the inn. Quite probably they had just left their charming mistresses to whom they had made the most solemn vows possible. In reality it would never have occurred to me to remind my lover not to desecrate in this manner those lips which had touched mine.

The scoundrel seemed to derive as much pleasure in this kiss as if he had kissed Phyllis or Oriane. It was a resounding kiss, heavily and solidly planted, bearing two little white marks upon the cheek of the girl; and she tried to remove their traces with the back of her hand just as she was washing the dishes. I do not believe that he had ever given so tender a kiss to the adorable goddess of his heart. This was apparently what he himself thought, for he said in an undertone with a disdainful movement of his elbow: "To the devil with thin women and noble sentiments!" This remark seemed to agree with the taste of the company, and all nodded their assent.

"Really," said the other, resuming his topic, "I am uniformly unlucky. Gentlemen, I must have confide to you under the seal of strict secrecy that I have at this moment a passion."

"Oh! Oh!" exclaimed the others, "a passion! How sad! And what are you doing with a passion?"

"She is an honourable woman, gentlemen, you must not laugh, for why should she not be an honourable woman, after all? Have I said anything ridiculous? Stop, or if you do not, I will fling the whole house at your head."

"Ah well! What then?"

"She is madly in love with me; hers is the finest soul on earth. I am well conversant with souls. I can judge them as well as I do horses; and I can guarantee her soul to be of the first quality. In her soul there is exaltation,

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ecstasy, devotion, sacrifice, and refined tenderness—all that is most transcendental. But she has hardly any breasts, has even none at all, like a girl of fifteen. She is, however, pretty in other ways. Her hand is fine, her feet small. She has too much spirit, but not enough flesh. I often feel inclined to leave her. I am very unlucky ; do pity me, dear friends.”

And softened by the wine he had imbibed, he burst into tears.

“Jeanette will console you in your misfortune,” his neighbour remarked as he poured more wine into his glass.

“Her soul is so thick that it could provide other persons with bodies ; and she has enough flesh to cover the skeletons of three elephants.”

O pure and noble woman ! If you only knew what was wantonly said of you at an inn in the presence of unknown strangers, by the man you love best and for whom you have sacrificed your everything ! How shamelessly he exposed you, and impudently betrayed you to the rude glances of his drunken comrades, while you are waiting in grief, with your chin resting on your hand, and with eyes fixed upon the road by which you expect him to return.

If somebody had told you that your lover, barely twenty-four hours after he had left you, would court a common maid-servant and arrange to spend the night with her, you would have surely protested that such a thing was quite impossible, and you would have never credited it. You would not have trusted your own eyes and ears had you witnessed the scene. Still, it was a fact.

The conversation continued for some time in the most foolish and licentious strain. But through all this exaggerated buffoonery and filthy jokes, one could observe a real and profound contempt for women ; and that evening I learnt more than I could do by poring over twenty cartloads of the works of moralists.



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The heinous and absurd things to which I had to listen spread over my face an expression of gloom and severity that attracted the notice of other guests. They tried to revive my spirits by chaffing me. But my gaiety could not be restored. I had suspected before that men were not just as they appeared to us; but I could not believe them so utterly different from the masks they wore, and my surprise was equalled by my disgust.

It would only require one-half hour of such conversation to cure any girl of her romantic ideas; that would be a more effective remedy than all maternal remonstrances.

Some boasted of their conquests, and the ease and rapidity with which they were made. Others communicated recipes for possessing wayward mistresses, or discoursed upon the tactics to be employed in the siege of virtue. Some heaped ridicules on their own mistresses, thereby proving themselves to be the greatest imbeciles on earth for being victimized by such sluts. They reckoned love very cheap.

Such then are the real thoughts concealed beneath these fine exteriors! Who would believe it after seeing men so humble, so servile and so obliging? Ah! how, after their conquest, they raise up boldly their heads and set their insolent heels on the brow which they once adored on bended knees! How vindictively they avenge themselves of their momentary abasement! What a terrible price they extort for their past civilities! What frantic brutality of speech and thought is theirs! What a hideous clumsiness in their demeanour and deportment! It is a complete change which certainly does them no credit. Though I entertained a great suspicion about men's sincerity, the reality is far more staggering.

O blue flower of ideal grace and chastity, that blossoms out, moistened by pearly dew under a vernal sky, with roots

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more slender than the fairy's silken tresses reaching the depths of our souls to drink the purest nectar—flower so sweet and at once so bitter, you cannot be plucked out without the heart being torn in all its recesses ; and from the broken stem ooze out drops of blood which, falling slowly into the lake of our tears, serve to measure the lingering hours of our last vigil over dying love.

Ah ! accursed flower ! how deeply you have buried yourself into my soul ! Your filaments have multiplied more rapidly than the stinging nettles in the wilderness. Young nightingales have drunk from your chalice and sung under its shadow ; butterflies with emerald wings fluttered about and danced around your frail pistils covered with dusts of gold ; swarms of bees have sucked heedlessly your poisoned honey ; phantasms folded their wings and crossed their sharp claws under their beautiful bosom to rest beside you ; the tree of Hesperides was not so better guarded ; sylphids gathered the stars' tears in the lotus-urns and watered you nightly with their magic vases. You are more poisonous than the Upas tree, how distressingly painful it is to tear you off from my soul in spite of the poison that we inhale with your fragrance. Neither the cedar of Lebanon nor the gigantic palm could fill the void left by you, O pretty little golden-hearted blue flower !

At last the supper ended, and it was time to retire for the night. But as the number of guests was twice that of the beds, it naturally followed that either each would sleep in turn or else two would share one bed. This was a simple arrangement for the rest of the company, but not so for me, as certain curves and protuberances which, though well concealed by the jacket and doublet, would be exposed in a simple night shirt. And really I did not feel disposed to reveal my identity to these persons who appeared then to me as veritable monsters, although I have afterwards come

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to regard them as tolerable comrades as good or as bad as others of their species.

The man whose bed I was to share was properly drunk. He threw himself upon the bed, one arm and one leg dangling out on the floor, and at once fell into a deep sleep; it was not the sleep of the just, but yet so deep that the angel of the last judgment could not wake him up even by blowing his trumpet into his ears! This, for me, simplified the matter fairly well. I merely took off my jacket and boots, stepped over the partner's body and lay down close to the wall.

So I was lying in the same bed with a man! rather nice way to begin my adventure! I confess that in spite of all my boldness I was singularly troubled and agitated. The situation was so strange, so novel that I could hardly believe it was not a dream. The man was sleeping heavily, but I could never close my eyes all night.

He was a young man of about twenty-four, good-looking, with a rather fine face, with black eyelashes and almost a blond moustache. His long hair floated around his head like the waves; there was a slight flush on his pale cheeks, and his parted lips wore a vague, languishing smile.

I raised myself on my elbow and gazed long at him in the flickering light of an expiring candle.

We were some distance apart. He was on the extreme edge of the bed, while I took the necessary precaution to lie on the other fringe.

Certainly all that I had heard was not likely to predispose me to any tender feelings of love. I had a horror of men. Still I was more perturbed and uneasy than I ought to have been. My body did not share the repugnance of my mind as much as it should. My heart was beating fast, I was excited; and in whatever side I would turn, I could not sleep.

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The most profound silence reigned in the inn ; only in the distance could be heard the dull thud made by horse's hoof in the stable or the patter of rain dropping on the ashes. The candle went out.

The blackest darkness fell on us like a curtain. You cannot imagine the effect produced on me by the sudden disappearance of the light. It was as if the end of things had come, and I could no longer see my own life clearly. One moment I felt an urge to get up from the bed, but what could I have done ? It was only two o'clock in the morning ; the lights were all out. And I could not wander like a ghost about a strange house. I was forced to stay where I was and wait for daybreak. There I was, on my back, my hands clasped, trying to think of something, but always reverting to the same thought that I was sleeping in the same bed with a man. I went so far as to wish that he should wake up and discover that I was a woman. Probably the little wine I had drunk, had something to do with this extravagant idea of mine, but I could not help falling back on it. Once I almost stretched out my arm to awaken him, when a fold in the bedsheet stopped me ; that gave me time to pause and reflect. While I freed my arm, I recovered my lost senses, at least sufficiently to regain my self-control.

Would it not be strange, if a disdainful woman like myself who insisted on delving deep into a man's past life before allowing him even to kiss her hand, had given herself on the common pallet at a wayside inn, to the first man she met ! And I was within a hair's breadth of taking such a step. Is it possible that a sudden effervescence in our blood could thus cool the intensity of the most resolute determination ? Is the voice of the flesh more clamant than the voice of the spirit ? Since then whenever my pride happens to soar to inordinate heights, I only need to bring it down to earth by reminding it of that night's experience. Now I

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have come to agree with men's opinion of us. How fragile is a woman's virtue, and what does it rest upon !

It is in vain that one yearns to unfurl her wings ! The body is really an anchor that binds the soul to the earth. Although it opens out its sails to the wind of high ideas, the ship remains immobile as if all the sea-weeds were hanging on to its keel. Nature delights in playing such tricks on us. When it finds a thought standing in exaltation on a high pedestal, it softly whispers a hint to the blood to march quickly to the entrance of the arteries ; then the temples whistle, the ears tingle, and then the thought is overcome to giddiness, all the ideas become confused and blurred ; the earth rocks like a barque in a storm, the sky gyrates and the stars dance wild. These lips which only recited austere maxims, now function differently ; they come forward as if to exchange kisses half way. These arms once so ready to repel all advances now become loose and soft ; they are prepared to entwine like scarves. And to add to that the slightest contact with a skin, and all will be lost. Often, even less is needed ; a tiny leaf from the woods that drops in through your open window, the sight of two birds pecking at each other, an old song of love that haunts you and which you repeat without comprehending its meaning, a warm breeze that disturbs and intoxicates your mind, or even the softness of your bed or your divan. Any single one of these circumstances is sufficient. Even the solitude of your bed room makes you feel that it would be so much better to be two together, and that no better nest could be found for a brood of pleasures. These drawn curtains, this half-light, this silence, everything brings you back to this feeling that brushes your mind with its perfidious dove's wings. The fabrics which touch you seem to caress you and amorously spread their folds around your body. Then the maiden opens her arms to the first lackey she meets when she is all alone,

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or the philosopher leaves his book unfinished, and with his head under the mantle runs as fast as he can to the nearest courtesan.

I did not certainly love the man who caused these strange disturbances in my mind. His only charm was that he was not a woman, and in my state of mind I thought that was enough. A man! that mysterious creature, that demon or god who alone can realize all the dreams of vague voluptuousness with which the spring cradles our sleep, and the only thought a girl chreishes after she is fifteen.

A man! the confused idea of pleasure floated in my heavy head. The little I knew still inflamed my desire. An ardent curiosity urged me to gratify once and for all the doubts which embarrassed me and were ceaselessly recurring to my mind. The solution of the problem was on the reverse of the page; I only needed to turn it over, the book was lying at my side. A handsome man, a rather narrow bed, a dark night, a young girl with a few glasses of champagne in her head! What a suspicious combination! But all that ended in just nothing.

Upon the wall where I kept staring at, as the dawn was nearing I began to distinguish the window; the panes became less opaque, and the grey morning light as it gradually appeared through them made them transparent again. The sky brightened up by slow degrees. It was daylight. You cannot imagine the pleasure the pale dawn gave me as it revealed the green serge hangings which surrounded the glorious battlefield where my virtue had triumphed over my desire! It seemed to me that it was my crown of victory.

As for my bed-fellow he had slipped down on the floor, and was lying there at full length.

I got up, dressed myself as quickly as possible, and hastened to the window; I opened it, and the morning breeze

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refreshed me. To arrange my hair I faced the mirror, and I was shocked to find my face so pale when I believed it to be purple.

The others came in to see whether we were still asleep. They aroused their friend by pushing him with their feet; but he did not appear to be at all surprised at his position.

The horses were saddled, and we resumed our journey.

But this is enough for the present. My pen refuses to write and I do not want to take a new one. I will tell you the rest of my adventures another time. Meanwhile, love me as I love you, Graciosa, and after all I have just told you, do not think too ill of my virtue.

## XI

MANY things in the world are annoying; for instance, it is a nuisance to have to repay borrowed money which one has come to regard as a gift, it is a trouble to caress to-day the woman one loved yesterday, or to call at a house at dinner-time and to find that the owner went away to the country a month ago. It is a bother to write a novel, and more so to read one; it is unpleasant to have a pimple on the nose when one goes to visit the heart's idol. It is troublesome to wear a pair of humorous boots which smile at the pavement from all their seams. It is tiresome to be a porter, or an emperor, or to be oneself or even some one else. It is painful to walk when you have corns, or to ride a horse when it aches your posterior, or to board a carriage when a fat fellow makes a pillow of your shoulder. It is vexatious to travel by boat when you get sea-sick and throw all your intestines overboard. The winter is disagreeable because of the frost; the summer because of the heat; but the most wearisome thing on earth, in hell or in heaven is a tragedy, unless it be a drama or a

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comedy. It really makes me sick at heart. What could be more silly or stupid than those big tyrants with the voice of a bull who pace the stage in flesh-coloured tights, waving the hairy arms like windmills. Are they not miserable parodies of Blue Beard and other Bogey Men? Their bombasts would make anyone laugh, who cares to keep awake.

The unfortunate women are no less ludicrous. It is highly diverting to see them advance, wearing either black or white, with their hair falling upon their shoulders, sleeves sweeping over their hands, and the body ready to burst out of their corsets like a nut squeezed between the fingers. All the while they seem to be dragging the floor along with the soles of their satin shoes, and in moments of grand passion they thrust their trains backwards with their heels. The dialogue entirely composed of "Oh's and "Ah's," which they cluck out like turkeys as they strut about like peacocks, is really an agreeable dish to swallow and digest. Their princes, too, are very charming, only they are a little gloomy and melancholy, though this does not prevent them being the best comrades in this world or elsewhere.

As for the comedy, which attempts to improve morals and luckily always fails to do it, I find that the father's sermons and the uncle's twaddles are just as boring on the stage as in real life. I do not favour the idea that the number of fools should be doubled by representing them on the stage; there are quite enough of them already, and their race shows no sign of extinction. Where is the need to give a representation of a man with a pig's snout and a bull's muzzle, and to listen to the prattle of an idiot who would be thrown out of the window, if he calls at your house? The part of a snob is as uninteresting as the snob himself; he is no less a snob for being seen through a mirror. An actor who could exactly



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imitate the poses and manners of a cobbler would not interest me more than a real cobbler.

But it is the fantastic, extravagant and impossible theatre which I prefer best, where the honest public would ruthlessly hiss from the very first scene, having failed to understand a word of it.

That one is a quaint theatre. Glow-worms take the place of the footlights; a scarab beating time with its antennae is in the conductor's chair. A cricket sings its part; a night-ingle is the first flute; little sylphs just emerging from the sweetpeas flowers hold violoncellos of lemon peels between their pretty white legs, and flourish spiritedly their bows, made of one of Titania's eyelashes, upon strings of cobweb; the little wig of the scarab, leader of the orchestra, is shaking with pleasure, and sheds around a luminous dust, so sweet is the harmony and so well executed the orchestra.

A curtain of butterflies' wings, finer than the inner pellicle of an egg, rises slowly after the usual three taps. The auditorium is filled with poets' souls, seated in the mother-of-pearl stalls, who look at the performance through drops of dew mounted upon the golden pistils of lilies which serve as opera-glasses.

The scenery is unlike any other known stage-scenery. The landscape it represents is still less unknown than America was before its discovery. The palette of the richest painter has not half the shades displayed in it. Everything is painted in strange and singular colours; green, blue ultramontane, yellow and red ochres are lavished upon it.

The sky of a greenish blue is striped with wide bands of white and fawn. Little, thin and delicate trees in the background display their foliage of dried rose tint. The horizon, instead of fading away in a bluish mist, is of the most beautiful apple-green, and here and there rise up some spirals of golden smoke. A wandering sunbeam rests

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on the front of a ruined temple or upon the spirit of a tower. Towns studded with towers, pyramids, domes, arcades and banisters are situated on the hills and cast their reflexions in crystal lakes. Mighty trees with ample foliage, deeply indented by the chisels of the fairies, inextricably interweave their trunks and branches to make the wings. The clouds in the sky heap themselves up one above the other like snow-flakes, and one can see in the spaces between them the eyes of gnomes and dwarfs, while their twisted roots dig themselves into the earth like the fingers of a giant's hands. The green wood-pecker strikes them in rhythm with its horny bill, and the emerald lizards warm themselves in the sun.

The mushroom with its hat on the head, watches the comedy with an insolent stare; the tiny violet rises on its tip-toe between two blades of grass, and opens wide its blue eyes to see the hero pass.

The bull-finch and the linnet sit at the end of the twigs to prompt the actors.

Through the deep undergrowth, tall, purple thistles with velvet leaves meander like silver snakes. Streams made of the tears of stags at bay sparkle; here and there anemones are gleaning on the grass like drops of blood, and daisies swagger with their heads decorated with coronets of pearls, like real duchesses.

The characters do not belong to any particular land or to any special period. They come and go, nobody knows why or how. They neither eat nor drink; they stay nowhere and belong to no profession; they possess neither land, income nor dwelling. Sometimes they carry under their arms little caskets of diamonds as large as pigeon's eggs. While walking they do not dislodge a single dew-drop from the flowers, nor do they raise a single grain of dust on the road.

Their clothes are the most extravagant and fantastic

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imaginable. They wear pointed hats with rims as large as a Chinese parasol, and enormous plumes from the tail of the bird of paradise or the phoenix. Their capes are striped with flashy colours; their doublets of velvet and brocade display vests of satin or silver cloth through the gold laces. Their breeches are distended like balloons; while embroidered scarlet stockings, high-heeled shoes with large rosettes, small slender swords with points upward, adorned with bands and ribbons, complete the men's equipment.

The women are no less curiously attired. The designs of Della Bella and of Romain de Hooze may serve to represent the character of their apparel; they wear stuffed, undulating dresses with large plaits, glistening like the breast of a dove, and reflecting all the changing tints of a rainbow; large sleeves from which other sleeves are issuing; open lace ruffs rising higher than the head, for which they serve as a frame; corsets covered with bows and embroideries, strange jewels, heron feather tufts, large pearl necklaces, peacock-tail fans with inset mirrors, garlands of artificial flowers, spangles, gauzes, rouge beauty-spots, and all that can add piquancy to a theatrical costume.

It is a taste which is not quite English, German, French, Turkish, Spanish or Tartar, though having something of each, having selected from each country what is most graceful and characteristic. Actors so attired can say anything they like without making it look incongruous. Fancy may wander anywhere, the style may unroll, at ease, its variegated coils, like a grass-snake stretching itself out in the sun, exotic conceits can open out without fear their unique chalices and spread around them their scent of amber and musk. Nothing can check anything, whether it be place or name or dress.

How charming and amusing are their speeches! My beautiful actors never would, like those common play-actors, twist their mouths and make their eyes bulge out of their

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heads to deliver a showy tirade in a search after effect. At least they do not give the impression of being routine-workers, or of yoked oxen in a hurry to finish their journey. They are not plastered with powder and rouge half-an-inch thick, they do not carry tin-daggers, nor do they keep in reserve under their cloaks a bladder of chicken's blood. They do not drag the same oil-stained rags throughout the whole play.

They do not speak hurriedly, never shouting, like well-bred persons who do not attach any importance to what they say; the gallant lover recites his declaration to his lady-love with perfectly detached air; while talking he strokes his thighs with his white gloves. The lady nonchalantly shakes the dew of her bouquet, and argues with her maid. The lover makes little effort to soften the cruelty of his mistress; his main preoccupation is to let fall from his lips bunches of pearls or of roses, and to sow with lavish hand the precious gems of poesy. Often *even* he forgets altogether his role, and leaves it to the author to court his mistress for him. Jealousy is not one of his vices, and he is of a most accommodating humour. With eyes uplifted towards the ventilator and friezes of the theatre, he complacently waits till the poet has finished; then he resumes his role and falls down upon his knees.

The plot winds and unwinds itself with admirable carelessness. The effects have no cause, and the causes have no effect. The most witty person is the one who makes the most foolish remarks and the silliest persons say the most ingenious things. Young maidens converse in a way that would make the old courtesans blush and courtesans give utterance to moral maxims. The most unusual adventures succeed each other without any explanation given. The noble father arrives post-haste from China in a bamboo-junk to identify a long lost kidnapped daughter; the gods and fairies incessantly climb up and down the earth and heaven

in their machines. The action plunges into the sea beneath the topaz dome of the waves, and traverses the bed of the ocean through forests of corals and madrepores, or else it soars into the sky on the wings of a lark or a griffon. The dialogue is quite universal. The lion contributes to it with a vigorous ejaculation "Ugh!" The wall speaks through its crevices; and provided that it has a pun, an epigram or a conundrum to throw in, anyone is free to interrupt even the most interesting scene; the ass's head of Bottom is as welcome as Ariel's fair head. The spirit of the author is displayed in every form, and all these contradictions are like so many facets which reflect its different aspects, while adding to it all the colours of the prism.

This pell-mell and apparent confusion tend to depict real life under its fantastic appearance more exactly than the most minutely studied social drama. Every man incorporates in himself the entire humanity, and in describing whatever enters his head he succeeds better than in copying with a magnifying glass the objects placed outside him.

O the lovely family! Youthful remantic lovers, Bohemian maidens, obliging maids, sarcastic buffoons, valets, and naive peasants, debonair kings whose names have been overlooked by the historian and whose kingdom omitted by the geographer, sharp-witted clowns! You allow your smiling lips to speak freely according to your whims. I love all of you: Perdita, Rosalind, Celia, Pandarus, Parolles, Silvio, Leander and all others, all charming characters, so false and so true, who on the multi-coloured wings of folly rise above the gross reality, and in whom the poet personifies his joy, his grief, his love and his most intimate dream under the most frivolous and improvised appearances.

In this theatre, where all the plays are written for fairies and ought to be played in the moonlight, there is one play which charms me particularly; it is a play so inconsequential,

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the plot of which is so airy, and its characters so odd that the author himself, not finding a suitable title for it, called it *As You Like It*—an elastic name which answers for anything.

While reading this strange play, you feel yourself transported into an unknown world of which a vague reminiscence lingers in the mind; you begin to doubt whether you are dead or alive, sleeping or awake; gracious figures sweetly smile upon you and give you a friendly greeting as they pass. You feel moved and agitated by their sight, as if suddenly, at a turning of the road, you are about to meet your ideal for the first time or the forgotten phantom of your former mistress would rise up unexpectedly before your eyes. Springs are flowing with a faint murmur; the wind shakes with tender sighs the old trees in the primeval forest over the head of the aged, exiled duke, and when gloomy James utters to the running brook his philosophy of melancholy, it seems as if you are yourself speaking, and that the most secret and obscure thought of your heart is revealed and illumined.

O young scion of the brave chevalier, Roland, so ill-treated by fortune! I cannot help being jealous of you. You have still one faithful follower, Adam whose old age remains so green beneath his snow-white hair. You are vanished, but at least you have first struggled and triumphed. Your wicked brother robs you of all your possessions, but Rosalind gives you the necklace from her bosom. You are poor, but you have loved; you leave your motherland but the daughter of your persecutor follows you beyond the seas.

The dark Ardennes open their great leafy arms to you to shelter and hide you; the benign forest gathers at the bottom of grottoes its softest moss for your bed; it inclines its arches above your head to protect you against sun and rain; it expresses its sympathy for you in the tears of the springs; and in the sighs of fawns; it turns its rocks into convenient

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and willing desks for your amorous epistles ; it lends you the thorns of its bushes to suspend them, and commands the satin bark of its birch-trees to yield to the point of your pen when you wish to write to Rosalind. If one could, young Orlando, have like you a mighty, shady forest into which to retire in solitude, when stricken with grief, and if at the crossing of the road one were to meet the idealized woman and recognize her in spite of her disguise! But, alas! the world of the soul has no verdant Ardennes, and it is only in the garden of poetic imagination that these little wild and wayward flowers grow, exhaling a fragrance which makes us forget everything. In vain do we shed tears, they never form those beautiful, silvery cascades. In vain we sigh, no sympathetic echo ever responds to our prayers. In vain do we attach sonnets to the thorns of the brambles, never does Rosalind pick them up, and it is simply of no avail, if we carve on the bark of the trees our words of love addressed to Rosalind.

Birds of the sky, swallows or eagles, lend me a feather to make a pair of wings for myself, that I may soar high and fast through unknown regions, where I may never find anything to recall to my memory the city of the living, where I may forget my own personality and live a strange new life farther away than America, Africa or Asia, farther than the remotest island of the world in the Arctic Ocean, beyond the pole where flashes the Aurora Borealis, in the impalpable realm whither divine creations of all the poets and the types of supreme beauty wing their way. How can one endure the ordinary conversations at salons after hearing sparkling Mercutio talk, whose every phrase bursts into a rain of gold and silver, like a firework bouquet under a sky studded with stars? Pale Desdemona, what pleasure do you expect us to find in any earthly music? What

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women do not look ugly by the side of your Venuses, ancient sculptors, poets of marble strophes?

Ah! in spite of the furious embrace with which I wished to envelop the material world failing the other, I feel that I was born through an accidental mistake, that life is not made for me, and that it repels. I cannot blend myself into anything; whatever path I follow I lose my way; the level, even road and the rocky path alike equally lead me to the abyss. If I wish to take my flight, the air condenses itself around me, and I remain imprisoned, unable to fold up my wings. I can neither walk nor fly, the heavens attract me when I am on earth, the earth when I am high above. Up in the air, the north wind tears off my wings; on earth the cobblestones hurt my feet. I have soles too tender to tread upon the real bits of broken glass; too narrow an expanse of wings to allow me to soar in the air and rise up through the profound azure of mysticism to the inaccessible heights of eternal love. I am the most unfortunate hippogriff, the most miserable accumulation of heterogeneous tit-bits which has ever existed since the ocean loved the moon and women have deceived men. The monstrous Chimera, killed by Bellerophon, with its maiden's head, its lion's paws, its goat's body, and dragon's tail, was an animal of simple composition, compared with me.

Within my frail breast dwell together the violet-strewn dreams of the bashful maiden and the fiery ardours of the voluptuous courtesan. My desires spring like lions, sharpening their claws in the dark and searching for some victim to devour; my thoughts more febrile and restless than goats, rush to the most dangerous cliffs; my hatred, steeped in poison, twists into inextricable knots its scaly folds and drags itself lazily along ruts and ravines.

My soul is a strange region, seemingly splendid and flourishing, but it is more saturated with putrid and dele-



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terious miasma than the environs of Batavia. The faintest ray of the sun upon the slime there hatches reptiles and swarms of mosquitoes; the large yellow tulips, nagassaris and angsoka flowers pompously veil the foul carrion. The amorous rose opens its scarlet lips and shows, while smiling, its little rosy teeth to the gallant nightingales who recite to it sonnets and madrigals. Nothing could be more enchanting; but it is a hundred to one that in the grass beneath the bush a dropsical toad is crawling upon its unsteady feet and leaving behind its track of slime.

There are springs more limpid than the finest diamond. Yet it would be better to drain the stagnant water of the marshes under rotting reeds than to dip the drinking cup in these pools. A serpent is hidden in their depths; it whirls with frightful speed, while disgorging its venom.

If you sow corn, asphodel, henbane, tares and hemlock spring up. From the roots that you had buried, sprouts, to your amazement, rough and deadly mandrake.

If you leave a souvenir there and come sometime later to recover it, you will find it greener than moss and covered with wood-lice and disgusting insects, as would happen to a stone placed on the damp soil in a cave.

Do not try to cross its dark forests; they are more impassable than the virgin forests of South America or jungles of Java. Creepers strong as cables hang from tree to tree; plants bristling and pointed like spearheads obstruct every passage. The earth itself is covered with a burning down like that of the nettle. In the arches of the foliage are hanging gigantic bats of the vampire type. Enormous crabs are waving their menacing horns and are beating the earth with their fourfold wings. Monstrous and fantastic animals such as are only seen in nightmares, are advancing painfully, breaking down the reeds before them. There are herds of elephants which crush flies between the wrinkles

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of their dry hide or rub their flanks against trees and rocks; there is the rhinoceros with its rugged carapace, and the hippopotamus with its inflated muzzle and bristling hair, which knead the mud and the debris of the forest with the huge feet.

In the glades where the sun penetrates through the humid atmosphere with his luminous darts, at the spot where you would like to sit down, you will always find a family of tigers lying down with supreme unconcern, inhaling the air through their nostrils, blinking their sea-green eyes, and licking their velvet fur with their blood-red tongues; or else there is a group of boa-constrictors dozing as they digest the last bull they have swallowed.

Beware of everything ; grass, fruit, water, air, shade and sunlight—everything is deadly.

Close your ears to the chatter of the little parakeets with golden beaks and emerald necks, which come down from the trees and settle down on your fingers with fluttering wings ; for though they may be attractive, they will in the end puncture your eyes with their golden bills the moment you stoop to fondle them.

The world does not want me; it pushes me back as if I were a ghost which has escaped from the tomb. I have the deathly pallor of a ghost; my blood refuses to believe that I am alive, and does not colour my skin ; it trails slowly through my veins like dirty water stagnating in a blocked-up canal. My heart does not beat for anything a man's heart should. My sorrows and joys are not of the same kind as other men's. I have violently desired what nobody else wants, and I have scorned the things for which most men are avid. I have loved women when they had no love for me, and I have been loved when I would rather have been hated; it has always been either too soon or too late, either too near or too far, never what should have been proper. I

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have thrown my life away or else I have concentrated it too much, upon a single point; and from a feverishly restless activity I have fallen into the gloomy passivity of the Stylist upon his column.

Whatever I do always seems unreal as a dream. My actions seem rather the result of somnambulism than of a free will; something is in me—I feel it obscurely deep down which drives me to act without my participation, and always contrary to common rules and laws. The simple and natural side of things only reveals itself to me in the last analysis; and I always see at first the bizarre and the eccentric. Should a line be slanting a little, I will soon make it into a spiral more twisted than the coils of a serpent; the contours, if they are not sharply marked out, soon become blurred and distorted. Faces assume a supernatural appearance and look at me with terrifying glances.

Therefore, in a sort of instinctive reaction, I am always clinging desperately to matter, to the external silhouette of things, and in art I reserved the place of honour to plastics. I can perfectly understand a statue, but not a man. Where life begins, I stop and recoil in terror as if I have caught sight of the head of Medusa. The phenomenon of life puts me into a great perplexity which I cannot get over. No doubt I will excel admirably in death, for I am such a miserable failure in life, and the feeling of my existence completely escapes me.

The sound of my own voice startles me and sometimes I feel tempted to think it is another's. When I want to stretch my arm and it acts accordingly, that strikes me as a miracle, and leaves me profoundly stupefied.

On the other hand, Silvio, I can comprehend perfectly the unintelligible; the most extravagant data seem to me absolutely natural, and I enter into them with singular facility. I can easily follow the tortuous processes of the most

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capricious and confused nightmare. That is the reason why the sort of plays I mentioned just now pleases me more than any other.

We, Theodore, Rosette and myself, have some long discussions on this subject. Rosette had little taste for my choice, she is all for realism. Theodore allows a poet more latitude, and admits the truth of convention and illusion; I myself maintain that it is necessary to give the author an absolutely clear and free scope where fantasy must hold supreme sway.

Many persons of the company argued that such plays were generally unsuitable for the conditions of the theatre, and therefore could not be performed. I replied that it was true in one sense and false in another, just as in the case of everything else, and the ideas of the possibilities and otherwise of staging the plays seemed to me inaccurate, and they savour more of prejudice than of reason; and I added that the play *As You Like It* could certainly be acted by members of the upper strata of the society who were never used to play other roles.

That led me to suggest the idea of performing it. The season was nearing its end, and every form of amusement is almost exhausted; we are weary of the chase, of riding and rowing parties, while the game of cards, however varied it may be, is not sufficient to add zest to the evenings; so the suggestion was warmly accepted.

A young man who could paint offered to do the stage decorations, and is now working at it with much enthusiasm; and in a few days everything will be ready. The theatre is filled up in the orangery, which is the largest room in the Chateau, and I hope all will go on well. I am to play the role of Orlando, Rosette is to act as Rosalind by her right as my mistress and the hostess. But she did not wish to disguise herself as a man through a caprice rather strange

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in one who cannot be accused of any prudery. If I had not been sure on that point I should have thought she had ill-shaped legs. Really none of the ladies of the party wished to appear less scrupulous than Rosette, and that fact nearly wrecked the play. But Theodore, whose part is that of James the melancholy, offered to replace her ; since Rosalind is almost always dressed as a man except in the first act when she appears as a woman, he could with proper make-up, a corset and a dress look the part well enough, having a slim waist and no beard.

We are now engaged in learning our parts, and we look rather funny. In all the lonely corners of the park you are sure to come upon some one, book in hand, mumbling phrases in an undertone, lifting his eyes to the sky, then suddenly lowering them, and repeating the same gesture seven or eight times. Anyone not knowing what we are going to do would mistake us for a bunch of lunatics or poets.

I hope we shall soon know enough for a rehearsal. I anticipate something very strange ; perhaps I am mistaken. I was for a time afraid that our actors, instead of acting on their own inspiration, would try to imitate the poses and vocal inflexions of some popular and fashionable comedian. But fortunately they have not studied the theatrical conventions of the day well enough to fall into such an error ; and I believe that they will display, apart from the gaucherie expected of people who have never acted before, precious flashes of naturalness and that charming naivete which the most consummate talent can never imitate.

Our young painter has really achieved miracles ; it would be impossible to give stranger shapes to the old tree trunks and the ivy clinging to them. He has taken as his model the trees in the park, accentuating and exaggerating them in the manner necessary for a stage-decoration. Everything is

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touched with a commendable dignity and caprice ; stones, rocks and clouds are mysteriously threatening in shape ; gleaming reflexions are thrown upon the running waters, and the natural coldness of the foliage is marvellously relieved by the saffron tints introduced by the touch of autumn ; the forest varies from emerald-green to purple ; the warm and the cool tones mingle harmoniously, and the sky itself extends from the most tender blue to the most fiery red.

Our artist has designed all the costumes from my sketches ; they are most beautiful in character. At first it was generally complained that they could not be translated into silk and velvet nor into any other known material ; and it seemed for the moment that the troubadour costumes would have to be adopted. The ladies protested that the glaring colours would dim their vision ; to this we retorted that their eyes were unquenchable stars, and that, on the contrary, their bright eyes would dull the colours, even the footlights and the lustre of the sun. They had no answer to that ; but objections were raised. They came like the Hydra of Lerna ; no sooner was one countered than another, more obstinate and stupid raised its head.

"How can you expect it to hold on ? It is all right on paper, but quite a different matter to put on my back. I shall never get into that ! My shirt is at least four inches too short ; I will not dare to appear in this ! This ruff is too high ; it will make me look like a hunchback, without a neck. This headdress ages me terribly."

With starch, pins and good humour everything was smoothed over. "You must be joking ! A waist like yours, more slender than a wasp's, which could pass through the ring on my little finger ! I will wager twenty-five pounds to a kiss that your corsage will have to be tightened. Your shirt is far from short, and if you could only see what a fine pair of legs you have, you would certainly agree with

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me. Quite the contrary, your neck stands out admirably well in its halo of lace. This head-dress does not age you at all, and even if you were to look a few years older, you are so exceedingly young that it would matter very little. Really you would give us strange suspicions, if we did not know where the broken pieces of your last doll were." etc., etc.

You could never imagine the prodigious amount of compliments we were compelled to improvise to persuade our ladies to put on the charming costumes which fitted them so well.

What a devilish taste women have! What titanic obstinacy is possessed by a feather-brained young woman of elegance who thinks that straw yellow suits her better than the jonquil or the rose! I am perfectly certain that if I had applied to public affairs half the ruses and intrigues I have employed to get a red feather placed on the left side instead of the other, I should now be a minister of state or even an emperor.

What a pandemonium! What an extraordinary uproar must there be in a real theatre!

Since the suggestion was first made of playing a comedy, everything here has been in a complete state of disorder. All the drawers are open, all the cupboards are empty; it has been a real pillage. The tables, armchairs and shelves are all littered, one cannot set foot anywhere; dresses, cloaks, veils, skirts, mantles, capes and hats are lying galore all over the house. And when you know that these are all for serving as costume of seven or eight persons, you cannot help being reminded unwillingly of those clowns at the fairs, who wear eight or ten garments one on the top of the other, and it is difficult to realize that out of this heap only one costume for each person will emerge.

The servants are running to and fro; there are always

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two or three on the way from the chateau to the town. And if this state of things continues for some time, all the horses will lose their breath for ever.

A stage-manager has no time to be moody, and I have not been so lately. I am so horribly plagued and stupefied that I begin to lose all my grip on the play. As I have to be the impresario and to play the role of Orlando as well, my task is doubled. Whenever a difficulty arises, they all rush to me for consultation ; and my decisions, not always being regarded as oracles, interminable discussions ensue.

If life consists of being always on one's feet answering twenty persons at once, running up and down the stairs, and never having a moment to think in twenty-four hours, then I have never lived so much as during this week. I do not, however, take so great a part in the movement as you might expect. The agitation is only skin-deep, and life does not penetrate into me so easily as that. Although I seem to be acting and mixing in all that is going on, I am, however, living the least in these moments. Action dulls and tires me to an unimaginable extent. When I do not act, I am thinking, or at least dreaming, and that is a mode of existence.

Uptil now I have not achieved anything, and I am not aware whether I ever shall do anything. I do not know how to control my brain, which makes all the difference between a talented man and a genius. It is an ever-lasting agitation, wave following a wave. I cannot master this kind of internal jet which mounts from my heart to my head and which drowns all my thoughts for lack of any outlet. I am unable to produce anything, not through sterility, but form an inexhaustible flood of ideas ; they come in such formidably serried ranks that they stifle one another before reaching maturity. Never will their execution, however rapid and impetuous, attain the necessary velocity. When I write



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a phrase, the thought it conveys is far away from me as if a century had elapsed instead of a second and it often happens that I unconsciously mingle an idea with the other thought which it has just displaced in my brain.

That is why I could not live either as a poet or a lover. I can only reproduce the ideas which I have ceased to possess. I can only love a woman after leaving her to possess another. How can I ever show my real self, since however much I hasten my steps, I have already lost the consciousness of what I am doing, and I act only according to a frail reminiscence?

To take a thought from my brain, to let it be, first of all, as unpolished and raw as a block of marble, rough-hewn from the quarry, to place it before myself, and from morning till evening, with chisel in one hand and a hammer in the other, to cut, carve and scrape it, and at nightfall to carry home a pinch of this powder to dry my ink with—that is a method I could never adopt.

In imagination I can easily reproduce the slim figure from the rough-hewn block, and I can visualize it clearly; but there are so many angularities to remove, so many chips to detach, so much hammering to be done before the proper shape is obtained and the precise contours reached, that my hands get blistered and I drop my chisel.

If I persist, my fatigue becomes so intense that my inner vision becomes totally obscure, and I fail to see through the cloud of opaque marble the fair divinity concealed in its depths. Then I pursue it haphazard, feeling my way about. I cut too deeply in one place, and not enough in another. I remove what was to be an arm or a leg, and I leave a compact mass where there should be more space. In place of a goddess, I produce an ape, and sometimes not even that, and the magnificent block, obtained at such enormous

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expense and tremendous labour from the entrails of the earth, carved, hewn and worked in every way, now assumes the aspect of having been gnawed and pierced by polyps to be turned into a beehive rather than carved by a sculptor on a given design.

How did you, O Michael Angelo! cut the marble into slices like a child cutting out a chestnut? Of what steel were your invincible chisels fashioned? What sturdy strength you, prolific artists and carvers, must have possessed, a strength which nothing could resist, to turn your entire dream into colour or bronze?

After the cruel remarks I made about myself, Silvio—and I know you are not the person to blame me for it—it is an innocent and permissible vanity on my part to say that although the universe will always ignore the fact, and my name is destined from the outset to be forgotten, I am a poet and a painter! I have ideas more beautiful than any poet in the world. I have created types as pure and divine as those most greatly admired in old masters. I see them there before me, as clearly and distinctly as if they were really painted, and if I could open a hole in my skull and insert a glass for others to view, it would be the most marvellous gallery of pictures ever witnessed. No king on earth can boast of possessing such a collection. There are blazing Rubens as fiery as the purest in Antwerp; my Raphaels are beautifully preserved and none of his Madonnas smile more gracefully; Buonarotti does not twist a muscle in prouder or more terrible fashion; the Venetian sun shines on this canvas as if it bore the signature of Paulus Cagliari, pictures which are in a style peculiar to myself, would not be disdained by any one. I realize it is rather strange for me to say all this and I must appear intoxicated with the most foolish self-conceit; yes it is so, and

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nothing will shake my conviction. Undoubtedly no one will share it with me. But what of it ?

Sometimes I find it difficult to conceal my thoughts on this subject ; it often happens that I speak too familiarly of those lofty geniuses whose lines one ought to adore and whose statues one ought to contemplate from a respectable distance on bended knee. Once I so far forgot myself as to include myself among them. Fortunately it was to a person who took no notice, or I should have acquired the notoriety of being the most bumptious coxcomb that has ever lived.

Am I not Silvio, a poet and a painter ?

It is a mistake to think that all persons who are reputed to be geniuses were really greater than other men. It is impossible to estimate how much Raphael's pupils and other obscure painters contributed to his reputation. He lent his signature to the imagination and talents of several people ; that is all.

A great painter and a great writer occupy and fill up by themselves alone a whole century. Their most anxious pre-occupation is to dabble in all forms of art and literature, so that if rivals appear on the scene, they will be the first to accuse them of plagiarism and stop them upon the very first rung of the ladder of fame ; these are well-known tactics, and though not novel, are successful every day.

It sometimes happens that an already famous man possesses precisely the same sort of talent that you yourself would have had ; to avoid passing for his imitator you are obliged to divert your natural inspiration into a different channel. You were born to blow your full lungs into the triumphant clarion or to bring back to life the spectres of time that are gone, yet you find yourself condemned to let your fingers play on a flute or work out embroideries in a boudoir, just because your worthy father did not think it

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fit to cast you into the mould ten years earlier, and the world does not admit of two men cultivating the same field.

For this reason it happens that many noble minds are compelled to take a route which is not their own, and to perpetually skirt their own domain from which they are banished; they are, however, still happy to cast a furtive glance over the hedge, and see the beautiful flowers opening out in the sun, the seeds of which they possess, but cannot sow for lack of proper soil.

As for me, leaving aside the fortuitous circumstances—the adequate resource of sun and air, a door that ought to have been opened but remained closed, a missed opportunity, somebody whom I should have known but never met—I cannot say whether I could ever become somebody.

I have not to my credit the requisite degree of stupidity to become what is termed a genius, nor the enormous obstinacy which is afterwards deified by the high-sounding name of will, once the great man has reached the glorious summit of the mountain. I know too well how all such things are hollow, containing, as they do, but putrefaction, to attach myself for long to any such pursuit with ardour. Men of genius are restricted within very narrow limits, this is why they have genius. Their lack of real intelligence prevents their seeing the obstacles which separate them from their objectives. They start with long strides, and rush over the intervening spaces. As their minds remain obstinately closed to certain currents and they only see the things most intimately concerned with their immediate projects, they attain their ends with the least possible expenditure of thought and action. Nothing distracts them, nothing turns them aside; they act more by instinct than otherwise, and several of them, when removed from their special spheres, display an inefficiency which is difficult to conceive.

Assuredly it is a rare and charming gift to write good

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verses; few people find more delight that I do in poetry. But still I do not wish to limit and circumscribe my life within the twelve feet of an alexandrine. There are a thousand things which interest me as much as a hemistich, not including, however, the society and its needed reforms. I do not care at all whether peasants learn to read or not, whether men eat bread or browse on grass; but there pass through my brain every hour a hundred thousand visions which have not the slightest concern with punctuations or rhymes; and that is the reason why I achieve so little, although I have more ideas than many poets who could be burnt up in a bonfire of their own works.

I adore beauty and I feel it. I can express it as well as the most beautiful statue can convey; yet I am not a sculptor. The ugliness and imperfection of a rough sketch revolts me; I cannot wait till the work begins to take proper shape through polishing and re-polishing to perfection. And if I could make my mind to leave out certain things in whatever I do, either in painting or versifying, I might possibly in the end write a poem or paint a picture that would make me famous. Those who may love me (should any man ever take this trouble) would not be compelled to believe in my word, and would have a triumphant answer to the sardonic success of the slanderers of that great unknown genius who is myself.

I see so many painters who take a palette and brushes, and begin to cover their canvases without in any way worrying as to what their mood will create at the tip of their brushes; I see some poets write out a hundred lines of verse without a stop for correction, without once lifting their eyes towards the ceiling. I always admire them, even when I do not envy their productions. I really envy with all my heart that charming intrepidity and that delightful blindness which conceals from their eyes their own defects,

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however conspicuous. The moment I have drawn something inaccurately, the defect glares at me and it disturbs my mind rather unduly. As I am more clever in theory than in practice, it often happens that I am unable to correct a mistake after detecting it. Then I turn the face of the canvas to the wall and never touch it again. My mind has been so much gripped by the idea of perfection that the disgust at my work overwhelms me and precludes all chances of its resumption.

Ah! When I compare the cheerful smiles that I picture in my imagination with the ugly grin on my canvas or paper, when I find a frightful vampire instead of the enchanting dream which opened during my long nights its wings of light, or a thistle in the place of a rose, and I hear a donkey braying when I expected sweet melodies from a nightingale, I feel terribly disappointed; I become so enraged with myself, so furious at my impotence, that I make up my mind not to write or say anything—not to commit the crime of being a traitor to my thoughts.

As it is, I cannot even succeed in writing a letter as I should like. Often I write what is quite different from what I intend; some points are emphasized disproportionately, while others are totally ignored. And very often the main idea which prompted me to write the letter is not to be found even in the postscript.

When I sat down to write this letter to you, I never intended to tell you half of what I have written. I simply wanted to inform you that we were going to perform a comedy. But a single word leads to a phrase, one parenthesis produces another, which in its turn is the precursor of others. And there is no reason why this letter could not be magnified into two hundred volumes, but that would most certainly be too tedious.

Directly I take my pen, a humming starts in my brain,

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accompanied by a rustling of wings, as if a thousand cockchafers have been let loose. The sound knocks upon the walls of my cranium, whirls about, descends and rises with a terrific din; it is the confused noise of my thoughts which desire to fly away all at a time; they all try to emerge at once; in the melee, more than one gets injured; some suffer from fractured legs, some from broken wings. Sometimes the doorway is so badly jammed that not even one could get out of this threshold to reach my paper.

That is how I am placed—not a very desirable state, certainly—but it cannot be helped. The gods are to be blamed for it, not I, who am a poor, helpless devil. I need not ask your indulgence, my dear Silvio. I know you have granted me that already. You are good enough to read to the end of my illegible scrawlings, my senseless musings. However, disjointed and absurd they may be, they always interest you, because they come from me, and I, bad as I am, still have some esteem in your eyes.

I can let you see what revolts the average man most; a sincere pride. But let us leave aside all these fine things and since the comedy we are going to play is the main theme of my letter, let us speak about it a little.

The rehearsal took place today ; never in my life was I so nervously agitated, not because of my natural embarrassment in reciting before an assemblage, but for another reason. We were in our stage-costume, and ready to begin. Theodore alone had not arrived yet. A messenger was sent to his room to find out the reason of his delay; he sent word that he was just ready and was coming down.

He came; I heard his footsteps in the corridor, and yet no one on earth has such a lighter tread than Theodore. But the sympathy I feel for him is so passionate that I could divine his movements through the walls; and when I sensed that he was about to place his hand on the knob,

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a thrill ran through my body, and my heart began to beat violently. I felt as though some important event in my life was going to be decided and that the solemn, fateful hour had struck.

The door opened, and was again closed slowly. There was a general shout of admiration. The men cheered, the women blushed scarlet. Rosette alone turned very pale and leant against the wall as if a sudden revelation had come to her. She made in a reverse way the same movement that I did. I always suspected her of being in love with Theodore.

Without a doubt, in that instant, she came to believe as I did that the sham Rosalind was in reality no less than a young and beautiful woman, and the frail castle of cards she had built in her mind collapsed suddenly, while mine, rose up from its ruins. At least such is what I thought. Perhaps I am mistaken, for I was scarcely in a fit state to make exact observations.

There were in the hall, besides Rosette, three or four pretty women; at once they appeared revoltingly ugly. By the side of the sun, the beauty of these stars was abruptly eclipsed. Everyone wondered how they could have been found even tolerable. Men who previously deemed themselves fortunate to have them for mistresses, would now have hardly accepted them as servants.

The image which uptil now had only been vaguely outlined in indistinct contours, the adored but vainly pursued phantom, was here before my eyes, alive, tangible, no longer in twilight, darkness or mist, but bathed in a flood of white light; not in disguise but in a proper costume; no longer in the derisive form of a man, but with the features of a most charming belle.

I experienced a tremendous sense of relief as if a mountain or two had been removed from my chest. I felt my horror of myself fade away, and I was delivered of the



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painful boredom of looking on myself as a monster. I returned to my former pastoral opinion of myself, and all the violets of the spring blossomed again in my heart.

He or rather she (for I want to forget I was stupid enough once to take her for a man) remained for a moment standing at the door, and as if to allow time for the audience to utter their first exclamation. A brilliant light illuminated her from head to foot; and on the dark background, she shone forth as if the light radiated from her instead of being simply thrown over her; one could have taken to be the product of a painter's brush rather than a creature of flesh and blood.

Her long brown hair, intermingling with the rows of pearls, fell in natural curls upon her beautiful neck. Her shoulders and breasts were bare, and never have I seen any so beautiful. The most noble marble never reaches to such perfections. How the life can be seen throbbing through the shadowy transparence! How white and tinted at the same time such flesh is! And how those fair shades harmonize the transition from the skin to the hair! What ravishing poems are there in the soft undulation of those contours, more supple and velvety than a swan's neck! If there were words adequate to express what I felt, I would have to pen a fifty-page description; but language has been invented by bores who have never gazed admiringly at a woman's back or breasts, and not half of the relevant and necessary terms exist in any tongue.

I am decidedly of opinion that I must become a sculptor; for after seeing such a beauty to fail to reproduce it in one way or other, is enough to drive a man mad. I have composed twenty sonnets upon those shoulders, but that is not enough. I should like something which I could touch with my fingers. Verses can only serve to reproduce the phantom of beauty, not beauty itself. The painter arrives at a more

exact likeness, but still it is only an appearance. Sculpture has all the reality a thing absolutely false can have ; it has its multiple aspects, it produces a shadow and it can be touched. Your sculptured mistress only differs from the real one in being a little harder and unable to talk : two very minor defects !

Her dress was made of silk fabric which looked blue in the light and gold in the shadow. A neat buskin enclosed a foot which did not need it to appear too tiny, and scarlet silk-stockings clung amorously around her well-shaped and seductive legs. Her arms were bare to the elbows, and they emerged plump and white from a round cluster of lace with the splendour of polished silver and a delicacy of lineaments quite undreamt of ; her hands, laden with rings, gently waved a large fan of many-hued feathers, which looked like a miniature rainbow.

She advanced into the room, her face slightly flushed with a red colour which was not artificial, everybody was enraptured, and wondering, if it could be possibly him, Theodore de Serannes, the dashing horseman, the dauntless duellist, the determined huntsman ; they were not quite sure if they were not beholding his twin sister.

Theodore looked as if he had never worn any other costume in his life. He was not embarrassed in the least in his movements, he walked in ease, and he was not encumbered by his train. He used his eyes as perfectly as he played with his fan. What a fine figure he had ! His slender waist could be spanned by one's fingers. It is wonderful, it is inconceivable ! The illusion could not be more complete. One would think he had a bust, so plump and well-developed in his corsets ; and then, too, there was not a single bristle on his chin. How soft was his voice ! Oh ! What a beautiful Rosalind, and who would not be your Orlando !

Yes, who would not be her Orlando, even at the cost of the torments I have undergone ? To love as I loved with a monstrous and inadmissible love, which could not be removed from the heart ; to be condemned to keep the most profound silence, and not to dare to say what the most discreet and respectful lover would tell the most severe and prudish of women, to feel oneself consumed by passions considered senseless and unpardonable in the eyes of a most depraved libertine. What are normal passions beside this, a passion shameful in itself, without hope ; while its improbable success would be a crime that would make one die of sheer shame ?—to be compelled by circumstances to desire for failure, to fear the chances and favourable occasions, and to avoid them as another person would normally seek them—such is my fate !

A sense of deepest frustration had taken hold on me ; I looked upon myself with horror mingled with curiosity and wonder. What revolted me most was the thought that I had never loved before, and that in my case it was the first burst of youth, the first daisy in the spring-time of love.

This monstrosity was taking in me the place of the fresh and bashful illusion of that glorious age. The dreams of tenderness that I so cherished, in the evenings along the rose-coloured alleys of the woods or in white marble terraces near the lagoons in the park, were thus to transform themselves into this deceptive sphinx with an inscrutable smile and an ambiguous voice, and before whom I stood still, never daring to attempt at solving the riddle ! A misleading interpretation of it would have caused my death, for alas ! it is the only bond that attaches me to the world, and when it breaks all will be finished for me. Take away from me that spark, and I shall be more inanimate than the mummy of the most ancient pharaoh.

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At times when I felt myself most passionately attracted towards Theodore, I took refuge in Rosette's arms, although I disliked her immensely. I was trying to interpose her between 'him' and myself like a barrier and a shield. And I experience a secret satisfaction when lying in bed with her in thinking that she was at least a real woman, and that if I no longer loved her, she still loved me enough for our liaison not to degenerate into intrigue and debauchery.

However I felt in my heart some regret to have been unfaithful to my impossible passion. I was angry with myself at this act of betrayal, though I was fully conscious that I could never possess the object of my love. I was also becoming colder towards Rosette.

The rehearsal was much better than I expected ; Theodore was particularly admirable. My acting was also found satisfactory. Yet I do not possess the qualities that go to make a good actor, and it would be a serious mistake to suppose me capable of taking up other roles with the same degree of success. But by a singular chance the words I had to utter so well suited my own state that they might have been written by myself rather than learnt by heart from a book. Had my memory failed me at one time or another, certainly could have filled the gap with an improvised phrase. Orlando was myself at least as much as I was Orlando, and it would be impossible to find a more marvellous coincidence.

In the scene where Theodore untied the chain from his neck and presented it to me, he cast at me a glance so languorous, so full of promise, and uttered with such grace and nobility the sentence : "Brave Knight ! Wear this in memory of me, of a young girl who would give you more if she had more to offer," I was really agitated, and it was only with difficulty I could continue : "What passion thus weighs upon my tongue and fetters it ? I cannot speak to her, and yet she desires to talk with me. O poor Orlando !"

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In the third act Rosalind, dressed as a man under the name of Ganymede, reappears with her cousin Celia who has changed her name for that of Aliena.

That scene made a disagreeable impression on me, for I was already so much used to that womanly costume which gave my desires some promising hopes and kept me in a perfidious but so enchanting an error! One soon gets used to looking upon desires as a reality on the faith of the most fugitive appearances, and I became gloomy when Theodore came on the stage in masculine attire, more gloomy than I was before; for joy only serves to emphasize our sorrow, the sun only shines to paint the horrors of darkness in more lurid colours; and the gaiety of the white lies only in bringing out in bolder relief all the sadness of the black.

His dress was most gallant and seductive, of an elegant and fanciful cut, adorned with ribbons almost in the style of the dandies at the court of Louis XIII; a pointed felt hat with a long plume which shades his lovely curls, and a Damascus blade peered from under his travelling cloak.

Still he wore his masculine habits in such a manner as to suggest that they had feminine counterparts; they were broader about the hips, and fuller at the chest, with somewhat more wavy lines than clothes generally assume upon a man's body. All this would leave only very slightest doubts as to the person's sex.

His demeanour was partly deliberate, partly timid; and with infinite artfulness he gave himself the air of being embarrassed in a costume familiar to him, while he had seemed quite comfortable in the apparel that was not his own.

I gradually recovered my serenity, and I persuaded myself once more that Theodore was a woman; finally I gained back the proper balance of mind to continue my part.

Do you know this play? Perhaps not. As I have done

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nothing for the last fortnight but read and recite it, I have learnt it entirely by heart ; and I cannot imagine that there could be anybody not so familiar with it as I am. It is a very common mistake which I often make, to think that when I am intoxicated, the whole of creation is so too, and if I knew Hebrew, it is certain that I should ask my valet in that tongue for my dressing-gown and slippers, and I should be very surprised if he did not understand me. You will read that comedy if you wish, I shall proceed as if you have read it, and only touch upon those passages which are relevant to my situation.

Rosalind, walking in the forest with her cousin, is very much astonished to find that the bushes bear, instead of blackberries and sloes, some madrigals in her praise : singularly strange fruits which happily do not usually grow on the hedgerows, for when one is thirsty it is nicer to find ripe fruits on the branches than bad sonnets. She is very anxious to know who has thus spoilt the bark of the young trees. Celia who has already met Orlando, tells her, after much entreaty, that the rhymers are no other than the young man who beat Charles the Duke's wrestler.

Soon Orlando himself appears, and Rosalind starts the conversation by asking him the time. Certainly this is a most simple beginning ; nothing more bourgeois could be found ! But wait a minute. From this ordinary and commonplace question you will see at once a crop of unexpected situations, replete with flowery and quaint comparisons as from the richest and most fertile soil.

After a few passages of sparkling dialogue, in which every word in falling upon the phrase makes millions of sparks fly right and left like a hammer upon a bar of white-hot iron, Rosalind asks Orlando whether he knows by any chance the man who hangs odes on hawthorn bushes and elegies upon the briars, and who seems to be daily afflicted

by a love-sickness, a malady which she knows perfectly well how to cure. Orlando confesses that he is the man so tortured by love, and adds that since she has boasted of several recipes to cure this sickness, he would be delighted to know something about them. "Are you in love?" replies Rosalind, "you have none of the symptoms of a lover; your cheeks are not hollow, your eyes have no black rings around them; your stockings do not hang loose about your heels; your sleeves are not unbuttoned, and the bow of your shoes is tied most gracefully; if you are in love, it can only be with your own self; and you would have no use for my remedies." It was not without a real emotion that I replied to him in these words: "Fair youth, I wish I could make you believe I love you."

This strange and unexpected reply, which is not brought out by the situation and which seemed to have been written expressly for my own use by the poet's precience, had a great effect upon me when I uttered it to Theodore; his divine lips were still slightly distended by the ironical expression of the phrase he had just recited; while his eyes smiled with inexpressible softness and a clear ray of benevolence gilded the upper part of his young and fair face.

"Do I believe it? It is easy enough to persuade the woman who loves you, and yet she would not readily admit that she loves you. That is one of the topics on which women always give their conscience the lie. But are you indeed the person who is filling the bushes with all those beautiful eulogies of Rosalind, and why should you need a remedy for your folly?" When she is quite certain that it is he, Orlando, and no other, who has written these admirable verses, beautiful Rosalind consents to tell him her recipe. This is what it comprises: she is to pretend to be the beloved of the love sick young man, and he is obliged to make love

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to her as though she was his real mistress, and to disgust him of his passion she gives way to all sorts of extravagant caprices; sometimes she weeps, sometimes she laughs; one day she receives him kindly, while she ill-treats him the next day; she scratches him, and spits on his face; she never for a moment displays her real self; she is simpering, fickle, prude, languorous in turn; and all the outrageous fancies, ennui, hysterics, and the blue devils may produce in the empty head of a mistress the poor fellow has to endure. A goblin, a monkey, and an advocate combining in a conspiracy could not have invented more spiteful mischief. This miraculous treatment did not fail to produce its desired effect; the lovesick man fell from an excess of love into a fit of madness, which bred in him a horror of the whole world, and he would end his days in a monastic cell—a not very satisfactory, though likely conclusion.

Orlando, as you can well believe, does not relish the idea of being cured by such means; but Rosalind insists and wants to undertake the cure. And she says: "I would cure you if you would only call me Rosalind, visit me every day at my cottage and woo me," she pronounces these words with such marked and obvious intent and such a strange glance that it was impossible not to attach to it a wider significance than the mere words conveyed and not to see in it an indirect appeal for a declaration of my true sentiments. When Orlando replied, "With all my heart, fair youth," she gave her answer in a still more meaningful tone: "No, no, you must call me Rosalind."

Perhaps I was mistaken and I thought I saw something which did not really exist; but it seemed to me that Theodore had perceived my love although certainly I had never betrayed it by a single word.

It was quite impossible for such a quick-witted woman as she is, and who had seen so much of life, not to have,



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understood what was passing in my soul. If not my tongue, my eyes and my perplexities were eloquent enough, and the veil of warm friendship that I had thrown over my love was not so impenetrable that an attentive and disinterested observer could not easily see through it. The most innocent and unsophisticated maiden could not have been deceived for a moment.

Some important reasons, unknown to me, has undoubtedly compelled the belle to assume this accursed disguise, which has caused me so much torment and which has made my love appear strange and abnormal. Otherwise all would have been easy, and plain-sailing. I could have allowed myself to fall into the most varied amorous fancies with sweet abandon; I could have taken in my own the little white and silky hand of my goddess without a shudder of horror, and without recoiling twenty paces as if I had touched a red-hot iron or felt the talons of Beelzebub himself.

Instead of despairing and working myself up as a maniac, beating my breast with remorse and bewailing my lot, I could have told myself with a satisfied conscience, "I am in love." That brief phrase is as nice and pleasant to utter in the morning with one's head upon a soft pillow in a warm bed as any other imaginable sentence of so few a word, except the one, "I have money."

After getting up I could have taken up a position in front of my mirror and looked at myself with a sort of respect, I should have been moved by my own poetic pallor, as I arranged my hair, I should have taken full advantage of it, as nothing is so clumsy as to make love with a scarlet face. When a lover is ruddy of complexion, he should every day plaster his face with flour and give up the practice of going out in fresh air. Then I should have breakfasted to feed this dear body, this precious bundle of passions, to convert

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the essence of food into good, warm blood and to maintain it in a fit condition to rejoice the hearts of benevolent souls.

After my breakfast, I should have interwoven a few rhymes into a sonnet, all in honour of my princess. I should have discovered a thousand little comparisons, all quite novel and incomparably gallant: in the first quatrain there would have been a dance of the suns, and in the second a minuet of the principal virtues; the two triplets would have been in as good a style: Helen would have been treated as a serving maid at an inn, and Paris as a village idiot. The Orient would have had nothing to covet in the magnificence of metaphors, and the last line especially would have been strikingly admirable, and would have contained at least two *concetti* in each syllable as the scorpion's venom is in its tail and the merit of the sonnet lies in its last line. The sonnet once composed and duly transcribed on glazed and perfumed paper, I should have gone out feeling that I was a hundred cubits tall; I must have to stoop lest my head should reach up into the sky and become entangled in the clouds (a wise precaution, by the way); I should have to recite my new production to all friends and enemies, then to suckling babes and their nurses, then to horses and donkeys, and finally to walls and trees, to find out the opinion of the entire creation on my latest effort.

At receptions I should have adopted a highly academic tone with the women, and carried on sustained discussions on sentiment in a solemn and measured strain, like a man who knew much more than he cared to say about the particular subject and who had not culled his knowledge from books; such a pose never fails to produce a shattering effect, and all the women present fall into hysteric fits like carps on the sand.

I could have led the happiest existence possible—stepped on a lap-dog's tail without making its mistress shout nervously,

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upset the old China table, and at meals eaten the choicest piece without leaving any morsel for the rest of the company; it would all have been put down to the well-known distraction of a lover's mind; and as they saw me swallow everything with a bewildered expression, people would have only said: "Poor fellow."

And then that dreamy mood, that dishevelled hair, those drooping stockings, those long arms loosely hanging down! How I would have traversed the avenues in the park with big strides, sometimes with a mincing step, like a man whose reason had completely departed! How I should have stared at the moon and drawn circles on the water in perfect peace! But the gods decreed otherwise.

I am enamoured of a beauty in boots and breeches, a proud woman who disdains the habits of her sex, and often leaves you in the most disquieting perplexities. Her face and body are those of a woman, but her mind is unquestionably that of a man.

My beloved is highly skilful in sword-play. She has fought numerous duels, and killed or maimed several men. On horseback she can leap over wide trenches, and hunts like a veteran country-squire. These are rather strange qualifications for a sweetheart; but I am the only person to whom such a thing could happen.

I laugh, but certainly without any reasons, for I have never suffered so much. And the last two months have been like two years or rather two centuries. There has been in my head an ebb and flow of uncertainties enough to stupefy the most resturceful brain. I have been so violently agitated and confused in every way. I have suffered such furious impulses, such fits of depression, such extravagant hopes and such deep despair that I do not know how I have survived them all. My mind was so much preoccupied and obsessed with this affair that I have been surprised that it was not visible.

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through my body like a candle in a lantern; and I have been in a state of mortal dread lest the object of my mad and wayward love should be detected. But Rosette, being the person who was most interested in my emotional life, had not apparently suspected anything. I believe she has been too deeply captivated by Theodore to pay any attention to the cooling down of my ardour for her; or else I must have been a pastmaster in dissimulation, but I am not conceited enough to believe that. Theodore has not shown any sign that he has the least suspicion of the state of my mind, and he has always spoken to me in a familiar and friendly manner, as a well-bred young man talks to a friend of the same age, and nothing more. His conversation with me has touched on all sorts of topics—art, poetry and the like; but there has been nothing confidential or intimate in relation to either of us.

Perhaps the motives for his disguise no longer exist and he would soon resume his proper attire. I do not know. But the fact remains that Rosalind has uttered certain words with peculiar inflexions, and in a very marked fashion accentuated all the passages of her role which had an ambiguous significance or could be construed so.

In the scene of the tryst from the moment she reproaches Orlando for not arriving two hours earlier like a real lover, but being two hours late, to the painful sigh which, frightened at the depth of her passion, she utters as she throws herself into Aliena's arms, "O cousin! cousin! my pretty little cousin! If you knew how many fathom deep I am in love!" She has displayed a marvellous talent. It was a mixture of tenderness, of melancholy, and of irresistible love. Her voice trembled with surging emotion, and behind the laughter one could feel the most violent love ready to explode; add to that the piquancy and the singularity of the transposition, and all that is novel in a young man making

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love to his mistress whom he mistakes for a man and who appears to be one.

Expressions which would have appeared commonplace in other circumstances now assumed particular prominence; and all the lover's usual comparisons and protestations which are current on the stage, now seemed to be recoined with a fresh stamp. Besides, even if the thoughts, instead of being so charming and original, had been hackneyed and pedestrian, the way she uttered them would have imbued them with the most wonderful ingenuity and best possible taste.

I forgot to mention that Rosette, after declining the role of Rosalind, had complacently taken up the small and secondary part of Phoebe. Phoebe is a shepherdess of the forest of Ardennes, madly sought after by the shepherd Sylvius whom she cannot stand and treats with the utmost harshness. Phoebe is cold as the moon whose name she bears; she has a heart of snow that does not melt at the warmth of the most ardent sighs, while its icy crust thickens more and more till it becomes as hard as the diamond; but at her first glance at Rosalind in the clothes of the handsome page Ganymede, the ice melts into tears and the diamond turns into soft wax. The naughty Phoebe who laughed at love is now herself in love; now she suffers the torments she inflicted on others. Her pride is humbled; she stoops to make all the advances, and she sends to Rosalind through poor Sylvius a letter which contains the confession of her passion in the most humble and ingratiating terms. Rosalind, touched with pity for Sylvius, and having the most effective reasons for not responding to Phoebe's advances, treats her very unkindly and mocks at her with extreme cruelty and fury. Phoebe, however, professes these insults to the most delicate and passionate madrigals of her unhappy shepherd. She follows the fair stranger everywhere, and the only reward she could obtain by her

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importunity is the promise that if he ever marries a woman, she shall certainly be the one. Meanwhile he advises her to treat Sylvius generously, and not to delude herself with too flattering hopes.

Rosette acts her part with sad and caressing grace in mournful and resigned tones. When Rosalind tells her, "I would love you if I could," the tears were almost falling from her eyes, and she could hardly keep them back, for the story of Phoebe is her own story just as Orlando's is mine, with this difference, however, that there is a happy ending for Orlando, while Phoebe, disappointed in her love, is deprived of her charming ideal and is destined to marry Sylvius. Such is life: one person's good luck is another's misfortune. It is most fortunate for me that Theodore is a woman, and it is painfully distressing for Rosette that Theodore is not a man. Now she finds herself involved in an impossible situation from which I have escaped.

At the end of the play Rosalind gives up the disguise of the page, Ganymede. Dressed in the garments of her own sex, she is recognized by the Duke as his daughter and by Orlando as his mistress. The god Hymen arrives in his saffron dress: three weddings are celebrated. Orlando marries Rosalind, Phoebe Sylvius, and Touchstone the Clown weds the naive Audrey. Then comes the epilogue and the curtain falls.

The play interested and captivated us in the extreme. It was to some extent a play within a play, a drama invisible and unknown to the audience, which we were acting for ourselves alone and which, in symbolic words, we summed up our whole lives and expressed our most secret desires. Without Rosalind's strange expedient I should have suffered more poignantly, deprived of the remotest hope of recovery, and I would continue to wander about in grief through the winding paths of the dark forest.

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Still I have but a moral certainty. Proofs are lacking, and I can no longer remain in this state of suspense. I must speak out to Theodore in a more definitive manner. Twenty times I approached him to give vent to my thought—but I was not able to utter a single word. I simply dare not. I have many opportunities to talk to him privately in the park, in my room or in his apartment, but I let them slip away, although I at once have a feeling of terrible regret, and am greatly enraged with myself. I open my mouth to speak, but I always say something else rather than what I was intent to tell. Instead of declaring my love I find myself talking about the rain and the sunshine or some other nonsense. However the season will be soon over, and all the guests will go back to town. The opportunities I have here will not occur elsewhere. Perhaps we shall lose sight of each other, and a contrary wind will send us adrift, miles away from one another.

The freedom in the country is so charming and convenient. Even the trees in the autumn with their falling leaves offer delightful shades to the musings of a new-born love. It is very difficult to resist the environment of beautiful nature—the birds with their languorous songs, the flowers with their intoxicating perfumes, and the hill-side with golden verdure! Solitude provoked a myriad voluptuous thoughts which the din and bustle of the world disperse or scatter away. The instinctive gesture of two beings who can hear their hearts beat in unison in the profound silence of a deserted country is to entwine their arms more closely in a deep embrace, as if they are the only two living persons left in the world.

I went for a walk this morning; the weather was warm and damp; and no patch of blue could be seen through the clouds, yet it was neither sombre nor menacing. Two or three shades of pearl-grey, harmoniously blended, enveloped

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the heavens completely; and over this background some fleecy white clouds were floating gently; they were driven by the dying breath of a gentle breeze hardly strong enough to move the leafy summits of the birch-tree. Clouds of mist rose between the chestnuts, and indicated the course of the river. When the breeze blew now and again, a few leaves fluttered about, driven along the path like flocks of frightened sparrows; then as the breeze died away, they lay down a few steps farther, as true images of those spirits mistaken for birds, freely flying on their wings and which are, after all, but leaves dried up in the morning forest, and tossed about to and fro like a toy by the lightest wind. The horizon was enveloped in mist, and became so dimly faint that it was hardly possible to demarcate where the earth ended and the sky began. The more opaque grey, a thicker mist, vaguely indicated the distances. Through this curtain the willows looked more like the ghosts of trees than the real trees. The meandering outlines of the hills resembled the undulations of clouds rather than solid earth. The outlines of the objects trembled in your eyesight, and a sort of grey weft, inexpressibly thin like a cobweb spread between the near planes of the landscape and the far-away depths. In the shady parts the etchings were more clearly drawn, and revealed the meshes of the network. In those places which were better lighted this foggy net was imperceptible, and blended with a diffused light. There prevailed in the atmosphere a certain drowsiness, damp and lukewarm and softly dull which predisposed one to melancholy.

While walking it struck me that my autumn had come too, and my brilliant summer had passed never to return. The tree of my soul was still more bare and denuded than the trees of the forest. There hardly remained on its loftiest branch a single small green leaf quivering with sorrow at the sight of its brethren falling away in quick succession.



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O little leaf bedecked with the colour of hope, stay on the branch, cling to the tree with all the strength of your fibres; be not scared by the whistling of the wind, good little leaf! For when you have left me, who will know whether I am a living or a dead tree, and who will prevent the wood-cutter from felling me with his axe and making faggots out of my twigs? It is not yet time for the trees to shed their leaves, and the sun can still dissipate the encircling fog.

The sight of that dying season impressed me greatly. It made me think that time was flying fast, and that I might die without having pressed my ideal to my bosom.

Coming back home I made a resolution. As I dared not speak, I wrote down all my life on a sheet of paper. It may be ridiculous to write to a person living under the same roof, whom you can see at any hour everyday. But I was not in a mental state to analyze the wisdom of my step. I sealed my letter, though not without a nervous blush. Then selecting a moment when Theodore had gone out, I placed it on the middle of the table and rushed out of the room in a state of great mental agitation as if I had committed the most abominable crime.

## XII

I PROMISED you a further instalment of my adventures, but really I am such a lazy girl in attending to my correspondence that if I was not so much fond of you as the apple of my eye and if I did not know you as being more curious than Eve or Psyche, I could never settle down at a table with a pile of white papers which has to be filled up and a bottle of ink deeper than the sea, every drop from which is to be turned into a thought or at least something resembling a

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thought. I would instead jump into my saddle and cover at full speed the eighty leagues that separate us to recount to you orally what I am going to pen in minute handwriting so that I may not be scared at the prodigious volume of my Odyssey.

Eighty leagues! So much distance between me and the person I love best in the whole world! Really I am itching to tear up my letter and saddle my horse. But I forget: in my present disguise I could not get near you and resume the old familiar life we led when we were two naive and innocent little girls. If I ever return to my skirts, it will be certainly for that object.

I left off my narrative, I think at my departure from the inn where I spent such a droll night and where my virtue was nearly shipwrecked on the eve of my leaving that port. We all set off together in the same direction. My companions were all admiration for my horse, which is in fact a thoroughbred and a very fast runner. That raised me considerably in their estimation, and they added to my own merit that of my steed. They were, however, afraid it was too frisky and impetuous for me. I told them they could allay their fears, and to show them that I was in no danger, I made it curvet several times and then leap over rather a high barrier and started a gallop.

The party vainly tried to follow me. I drew my reins when I had gone far enough and came back to meet them at full speed; as I approached them, I reined up and the horse stopped suddenly, falling at once to its four feet, which as you know, is a difficult feat to perform.

Their esteem for me turned into deep respect. They did not suspect that a young student just fresh from the university could be such an accomplished horseman. Their discovery had more effect than if they recognized in me all the theological and cardinal virtues. Henceforth, instead of

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treating me like a big school-boy, they addressed me in a tone of obsequious familiarity which pleased me immensely.

I had not discarded my pride along with my womanly attire. Being no longer a woman, I wished to be a complete man, and I would not be content with having the outward appearances only. I was determined to attain the success as a cavalier which I could no longer pretend to have as a woman. What worried me most was to know how to manage to acquire sufficient courage; for bravery and skill in physical exercises are the best foundations of a man's reputation. I am not timid for a woman, and I am not foolishly faint-hearted as many of my sex; but that is a long way off from that careless, ferocious brutality which contributes to the glory of man. My intention was to become a little bully, a swaggerer in order to assert myself in society and to enjoy all the advantages of my metamorphosis.

But soon I found out that nothing was easier, and the recipe was a very simple one.

I shall not narrate, as the travellers usually do, to you the number of miles I covered every day, nor should I tell you that I called at this town or village, or that the roast served to me at the "White Horse" or the "Iron Cross" was underdone or burnt, that the wine was sour and that the bed-curtains were embroidered with flowers. Such important details may be of interest to the posterity; but I shall omit them, and you must resign yourself to remain ignorant of the number of courses of which my dinner consisted, as also whether I slept well or not during my journey. Nor will I give you an exact description of the various country scenes, the wheat-fields, forests, hamlets or hillocks which passed before my eyes in succession. That is quite easy for you to imagine. Take a little plot of land, plant a few trees and shrubs, daub behind them a bit of grey or blue sky, and you will have a fair idea of the changing

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background of our cavalcade. If in my previous letter I dwelt on such details of this nature, do forgive me, and I will not fall again into the same error. As I had never gone out before, the most trifling detail seemed to me of enormous importance. One of the horsemen, my bed-fellow, whose sleeves I had nearly pulled in that memorable night, developed a real passion for me and rode by my side all the time.

He was not displeasing to me, though I would never have him for a lover, even had he brought me the finest ring in the world. He was well-read, and was not lacking in wit or good humour. Only when he spoke of women, he did so in such a tone of deep contempt and of biting irony that I would have gladly plucked off his two eyes, the more so because there was, beneath his exaggeration, much bitter truth in what he said and the justice of which my manly disguise forced me to admit.

He invited me in so pressing a manner to come with him to one of his sisters, a widow now living in an old chateau with an aunt, that I could not refuse. I raised a few objections for formality's sake, for really it mattered little to me whether I went there or elsewhere; and I could just as well attain my objective in that way as in any other. As he told me that he would mind it very much if I did not spend a fortnight with him, I finally agreed.

At a turning of the road, my new friend pointing to the right, said to me: "That is our way." The rest of the party bade good-bye, and went off in the other direction.

After a few hours' ride we reached our destination.

A wide moat which was covered with abundant vegetation, separated the high road from the park. Its facing was of hewn stone, and in the angles stood gigantic artichokes and iron thistles which seemed to have sprung up like natural plants between the disjointed blocks of the wall. A single-

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arch bridge crossed the dried-up moat and provided access to the gate.

An avenue of elms trimmed in the old style first came into view, and after walking some distance along it we emerged into an open space.

Those trees looked more superannuated than old. They gave the impression that they had wings and were powdered with white. Only small tufts of foliage had been left to them on the top off their heads. All the rest had been carefully lopped off, so that they looked like enormous plumes planted at intervals.

After crossing the open space which was covered with a fine and carefully rolled lawn, it was still necessary to pass beneath a curious arch of foliage. Through glades could be seen a semi-ruined castle, the moss-eaten steps of a dried-up cascade or a vase or a statue of anymph or a shepherd with broken noses or fingers, and pigeons perched on their heads or shoulders.

A large flower-garden in the French style spread itself in front of the chateau; all its sections were traced with bushes and holly with the most rigorous symmetry. It looked more like a carpet than a garden. Large flowers in ball-dress with majestic bearing and serene mien, like duchesses ready to dance a minuet, made a slight inclination of the head as we passed. Others, apparently less polite, held themselves stiff and motionless like tepestry dowagers. Shrubs of all possible shapes—excepting their natural one, round, square, pointed, triangular—seemed to be walking in procession along the main avenue, and lead you by the hand to the steps before the entrance of the chateau.

A few turrets, half absorbed in more recent constructions, broke the line of the building. The windows of the middle pavilion all opened out to a balcony ornamented with a balustrade of wrought iron and the others were

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surrounded by stone ledges with carved figures and knots.

Four or five big dogs ran to us, barking. They gambolled around our horses and jumped up in front of them; they seemed particularly glad to see my companion's horse, one they had probably often accompanied and visited in the stable.

At all this noise, a valet who might have been a groom, appeared; he took our steeds by the bridle and led them away. I had seen no person yet, save a little peasant girl as wild and scared as a deer, who fled at our approach and crouched in a trench; although we had called her several times and done our best to reassure her.

Nobody was to be seen at the windows. It seemed as if the chateau was either uninhabited or else was haunted by ghosts, for not the slightest noise could be heard from without.

We were walking up the steps, clanking our spurs, for our legs were weary, when we heard from within the sound of doors opening and closing as if some one was hastening to meet us.

When a young woman appeared at the door, cleared in one leap the space separating her from my companion and fell upon his neck. The latter kissed her affectionately, and putting his arm round her waist almost lifted her up and carried her to the landing.

"Do you know you are much too gallant and loving for a brother, Alcibiades? Monsieur, I feel sure I rather need to tell you that he is my brother, as he does not behave like one!" said the young belle, turning towards me. I replied that it was possible to be mistaken, and that it was to some extent a misfortune to be her brother and so be excluded from the number of her lovers; that I, personally, in his place, should become at once the happiest and the

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most unhappy cavalier on earth. That made her smile sweetly.

While talking we entered a low room with its walls decorated with a Flemish tapestry. Some large trees with pointed leaves were swarmed with exotic birds; the colours altered by exposure produced quaint transpositions of shades. The sky was green, the trees blue, with yellow lights, and in the draperies of the persons, the shadows were often of the opposite colours to those in the ground. The colour of the wood was that of the flesh; and the nymphs strolling under the faded shadows of the forest looked like undressed mummies. Only their mouths, which had preserved their natural colour, seemed to be alive. In the plain of the foreground some tall plants of an odd green tint were shooting up, with variegated flowers the pistils of which resembled the lovely tufts on the peacock's brow; the sombre-looking herons, with their heads ensconced in their shoulders, stood up philosophically on their thin legs in black, still water streaked with tarnished silver threads. Through openings in the foliage could be seen from afar some small castles with balconies crowded with ladies dressed in gorgeous attire looking down on the hunting parties below, curiously shaped rocks from which issued torrents of white wool were blended on the horizon with overhanging clouds.

One of the things that struck me most was a huntress aiming at a bird with a bow. Her fingers had just released the string, and the arrow had left; but as this portion of the tapestry was placed in a corner, the arrow was to be seen on the other side of the wall. As for the bird it was in flight, and seemed to be making for a bough nearby.

The plumed arrow, with its golden tip, ever in the air but never reaching its aim, produced a singular impression; it was like a painful and melancholy symbol of human

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destiny, and the more I looked at it, the more mysterious and sinister meaning I read into it. The huntress was standing there, her feet spread forward, knees bent, silken eyelashes wide-open, and yet unable to see the arrow which had deviated from its course: she seemed to be anxiously looking for the bird she wanted to bring down. I do not know whether it is a fantastic exaggeration of my imagination; but I found in her face an expression of woeful despair, that is stamped on the countenance of a poet, dying without having completed his work on which he banked his reputation.

I have expatiated on the subject of this tapestry, rather unduly. But I have always been peculiarly affected by the mysterious worlds created by the embroiderers.

I love passionately those imaginary flowers and trees that never existed in reality, those forests of strange trees inhabited by unicorns, and those snow-white stags bearing golden crucifixes, between their horns, habitually pursued by red-bearded hunters in saracenic garb.

When I was a little girl I never entered into a tapestried room without a nervous thrill, and I did not dare to walk through it.

All those figures standing against the wall, to which the wavy curves in the dress and the play of light lent a semblance of weirdness, seemed to me as so many observant spies watching over all I did, with a view to report my activities; and hence I would never have dared to eat a stolen apple or cake in their presence.

How many stories could those grave personages relate if they could open out their red woollen lips, and if sound could penetrate into their embroidered ears! Of how many murders, acts of treason, infamous adulteries and of all kinds of monstrous deeds have not these tapestries been the silent and indifferent witness!



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But let us leave aside the tapestry and resume our story.

"Alcibiades, I am going to tell our aunt that you have arrived."

"Oh, no need of hurry, sister! Let us sit down and have a talk. Allow me to introduce to you a cavalier, Theodore de Serannes, who will stay with us for some time. It is needless to ask you to give him a warm reception; he is his own recommendation." (I am recording his exact words; please do not think me a conceited fool).

The belle gave me a little nod as if to signify her assent, and we talked of other things.

While conversing I looked at her attentively and critically.

She was about twenty-three or twenty-four, and her mourning suited her perfectly. To tell the truth, she did not appear to be at all sad or grief-stricken. I doubt whether she had shed many a tear for her departed spouse. If she had done so, no trace of it had been left; and the pretty cambric handkerchief she held in her hand was as dry as it could be. Her eyes were not red, on the contrary they were the most brilliantly clear that could ever be seen; and one would have searched in vain her cheeks for any disfiguring mark caused by the flow of tears. The only things visible there were two little dimples fashioned by her constant smiles. Moreover she displayed her teeth very frequently—which was not an unpleasant sight, as they were pretty and well-formed. I esteemed her, from the outset, for not feeling herself obliged to spoil her looks simply because her husband was dead. I considered it a good taste on her part to refuse to assume a doleful mien, and to speak naturally in her cheerful, sonorous voice, without drawling her words or interjecting her phrases with pious sighs.

All that convinced me that she had a refined taste, and I considered her as a clever, vivacious woman; my estimate

was quite correct. She was well-built with aristocratic hands and feet. Her black dress was arranged coquettishly and gaily, so that the gloom of its colour disappeared altogether; and she could have easily gone to a ball without looking odd or out-of-place. If ever I marry and am left a widow, I shall ask her for a pattern of her dress which was really a perfection.

After a little talk we all went upstairs to meet the aunt. We found her sitting in a large arm-chair with her feet on a foot-stool, and by her side an old dog, sullen and almost blind, which lifted its black head at our approach, and received us with an unfriendly growl.

I have never gazed upon an old woman without a feeling of horror. My mother died quite young; no doubt if I had seen her aging slowly and her features imperceptibly getting distorted, I should have become used to the change. In my childhood I had only young and laughing faces around me; so I retained my intolerable antipathy for elderly folk. I was shocked when the youthful widow touched with her red lips the dowager's yellow forehead. I cannot repress this feeling, and I will still have it, even when I myself shall be sixty. I cannot help it, and pray to God that I may die young like my mother.

Still the old lady had preserved a few simple and majestic traces of her former beauty, which prevented her from degrading into that ugliness of the baked-apple type, which falls to the lot of average women who have only been pretty or fresh-complexioned. Her eyes, though terminating in wrinkles at their corners and covered by large, loose lids, had still retained the last remaining sparks of their former fire; and it was obvious that in the reign of the former king, they must have cast dazzling and passionate glances. Her small, slender nose, slightly hooked like the beak of a bird of prey gave to her profile an

appearance of severe grandeur, tempered by the indulgent smile of her lips which, according to the fashion of the last century, were tinted with carmine.

Her costume was old-fashioned without being ridiculous and in perfect harmony with her figure. She had as a head-dress a simple, white bonnet with lace-border; her long, emaciated hands which seemed to have been once beautiful, were in mittens. Her dress which had the colour of dead leaves was embroidered with flowers of darker hues. A black shawl and an apron completed her attire.

Old ladies should always dress in the like manner, and thus show their respect for the approaching death by refusing to adorn themselves with feathers, garlands of flowers, ribbons of soft colours and other trinkets which only suit extreme youth. Whatever advances they may make to life, life has no further use for them. They would only waste their time like those wanton women who, in spite of all the plaster and rouge on their faces are repelled even by drunken muleteers with insults and kicks.

The old lady received us with that ease and exquisite politeness which is the privilege of members of the old nobility, and which is growing rarer day by day along with many other charming and delicate secrets of high life. She spoke in a voice which, although broken and tremulous, was still very sweet.

She seemed to like me very much, and looked at me with tender interest for a long while. She appeared deeply moved. A tear glistened in the corner of her eyes, and rickled slowly down one of her wrinkles till it disappeared. She begged me to excuse her and told me that I looked very much like her son who had been killed in war.

As long as I stayed at this chateau, because of this real or imaginary likeness, I was treated by the old lady with an extraordinary and almost maternal kindness. I found it

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more pleasant than I believed possible, for the greatest kindness aged persons as a rule can do me is to keep silent and leave me alone.

I shall not relate in detail what I did every day at R. . . . If I have written so much about this place and those people, it is because many strange things have happened to me there, events which I ought to have anticipated specially when I have assumed masculine disguise.

My natural levity led me into an imprudence of which I bitterly repented, for it has caused much trouble to a fine and beautiful soul, which I could not allay without revealing my identity and thereby compromising myself seriously.

To play the part of a man perfectly and amuse myself. I found nothing better to do than to court my friend's sister. It appeared to me very funny to go down on all fours to pick up the glove she dropped and to restore it to her with extreme gallantry, to lean over the back of her arm-chair with languorous air, and to pour into her ear a thousand and one charming madrigals. Whenever she wanted to go from one room to another, I gracefully offered her my hand ; if she mounted her horse, I held the stirrup ; when she walked, I was always by her side. In the evenings I was reading to her or singing with her. In short I was performing with scrupulous exactitude all the tasks which a courting cavalier had to do.

I imitated all the gestures and mannerisms which I had seen lovers make, much to my diversion ; alone in my chamber I laughed like a crazy girl when I recalled all these impertinences I had uttered in a most serious tone.

Alcibiades and the old Marchioness seemed to approve of this intimacy and very often left us together in a *tete-a-tete*. Sometimes I regretted for not being really a man to profit by this opportunity to the full. If I had been a man, I could have won her heart successfully, for the lovely widow

seemed to have entirely effaced from her mind all memories of her dead husband, or else if she had remembered him, she should have readily agreed to be unfaithful to his memory.

Having started in this fashion, I could scarcely turn back with honour, and it was very difficult to beat a retreat with arms and baggage. I could not however go beyond a certain limit and could only restrict my love-making to words alone. I hoped to behave in this manner till the expiry of the month I was to spend there, and then to leave with a promise to return, which I could not intend to keep. I thought that the belle would soon find some other means to solace herself and eventually forget me, when she could not see me again.

But it happened that I had unwillingly awakened a serious passion in her, and events turned out differently. This reminds me of the well-known truism that no one should ever play with fire or love.

Before she met me, Rosette had not known love. Married very young to a man much older than herself, she had developed a sort of filial affection for him. No doubt she had been courted, but she had never had a lover, however unusual this may seem. Either the gallants who paid her attentions were just crude seducers or, which is more probable, her hour had not yet struck. The provincial suitors could talk only of hunting, dogs, stages, etc, intermingling it all with charades and puns, and hackneyed madrigals; so they were assuredly not to her liking; and her virtue had not been sorely tried to prevent her from yielding to them. Moreover, her natural gaiety and playfulness were a sufficient defence against love, that soft passion which has such a hold on dreamers and the moody people in general. The idea that her old Tithon could give her of passionate love must have been such a poor one that she was not very much tempted to try it again; and she was enjoying the sweet

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pleasures of widowhood at so tender an age, with the prospects of preserving her beauty for so many years more.

But on my arrival events assumed a very different complexion. At first I thought that if I had just been correct and formally courteous with her she would have taken no notice of me, but truly I had to admit later that such assumption, however modest, was entirely gratuitous. Alas! nothing can alter the decrees of fate, and none can evade the influence of his star, benign or malign. Rosette's destiny was to love once only—an impossible love ; she must follow it.

I have been loved, O Graciosa ! and it is so sweet an experience, although it is only by a woman and in such an abnormal love there was something painful which is not found in the other. Oh, it is very sweet, when waking up at night you would raise yourself on your elbow and reflect—"There is some one who thinks or dreams of me ; a movement of my eyes and lips means joy or sorrow to another. Words that I drop by chance are eagerly picked up, commented upon and scanned carefully for hours together. I am the pole-star which attracts a distracted magnet, my eye is a heaven, my mouth a paradise more desired and desirable than the real one ; should I die, a warm flood of tears would stir up my ashes, my tomb would be adorned with flowers more beautifully than a bridal casket. Should I be in danger, some one would rush to throw her body between my breast and the point of the sword, and sacrifice herself for me !" That is really magnificent and I could never wish for anything more in this world.

That thought gave me a pleasure with which I reproached myself, since I had nothing to give in return, and I was in the plight of a penniless man who accepts the gifts of a rich and generous patron without the slightest hope of ever reciprocating them. I was really enchanted to be so

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much adored, and at times I accepted the situation with a singular equanimity. I was so used to hearing myself called 'Monsieur,' and to being treated like a man that I was unconsciously forgetting my real identity. My disguise seemed to be my appropriate dress, and I forgot I had ever worn any other. It escaped my memory that I was just a little, giddy girl who had turned her needle into a sword and made a pair of breeches out of one of her skirts.

Many men are more womanly than I am. I have only a woman's breasts, a few curves and delicate hands. A skirt fits in with my hips, but not with my spirit. Often it happens that the sex of the soul is not the same as that of the body, and such a contradiction is bound to produce much disorder. If, for instance, I had not taken the resolution—apparently foolish, but in reality, very wise—to renounce the habits of a sex which is mine physically and by accident, I should have been very unhappy. I am fond of horses; I like fencing and all other kinds of strenuous physical exercises. I am delighted to climb and run about like a boy. I dislike to sit down with both feet close together, elbows stuck to my sides—to lower my eyes demurely to talk in a soft, honeyed and piping voice, and to pass ten million times a bit of wool through the meshes in a canvas. I do not at all like obeying anybody, and the words I use most often are: "I want or I will this." Beneath my polished brow and my silky hair, some strong and virile thoughts are stirring. The precious trifles that usually women have but little charm for me, and like Achilles, disguised as a girl I would readily discard the mirror for a sword. The only thing I like in women is their beauty; in spite of all the drawbacks resulting from it, I would not willingly renounce my form, however ill it may suit the spirit it shelters.

Such intrigue has a special piquancy of its own, and I should have found it highly entertaining if poor Rosette had

not taken it so seriously. She had come to love me with admirable naivete and sincerity, and with all the strength of her beautiful and kind soul. Hers is a love that men never understand, and of which they have only a dim idea. She loved delicately and ardently, as I should wish to be loved, and as I would love if I met the ideal of my dreamings. What a beautiful treasure wasted, what a white transparent pearl such as no diver could ever bring up from the depths of the ocean! What fragrant breath, what soft, sweet sighs scattered in the air, which could have been gathered by pure and loving lips! That passion could have made a young man so blissfully happy! How many unfortunate, beautiful, charming, gifted men, of refined spirit, vainly worship, on bended knees, some dull, unfeeling idols! So many tender and kind souls have thrown themselves, in despair, into the arms of courtesans or silently fade away like lamps in the sepulchres, who could have been saved from debauchery and death by a sincere love.

How peculiarly capricious is human destiny! And what a great jester is fortune!

What others had so ardently desired came to me easily, to the person who did not want it and who had no use for it. A wayward, moody girl has a fancy to travel in the country, dressed as a young man to find out the nature of her prospective lover. She sleeps in bed with a worthy brother who takes her to his young sister who finds nothing more agreeable to do than fall in love like a cat or a dove. It is quite obvious that if I had been a young man and her love had been of advantage to me, matters would have taken an entirely different turn and she would have developed a healthy horror of me. Destiny loves to present slippers to people with wooden legs and gloves to those who have no hands and the legacy that would have enabled you to live in comfort usually comes to you on your death bed.



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I went some times to see Rosette in her chamber although she generally never received anybody before getting out of bed. She waived this rule in my favour. She would have granted me many other favours, had I wanted them, but as people say, the prettiest girl in the world can only give what she possesses, and what I had would not have been of any use to Rosette. But how could I break it to poor Rosette!

She used to give me her little hand to kiss. I confess that I found great pleasure in kissing it, as it was very sweet, very white and exquisitely perfumed. I felt it tremble and contract under my lips, the pressure of which I mischievously prolonged. Then Rosette, quite moved and with a suppliant air, turned towards me her almond eyes laden with passion and flooded with humid and transparent light, before dropping back on the pillow her pretty hand which she slightly raised to receive me. I could see beneath the sheet her bosom heave and a thrill run through all her body. Obviously anyone who was in a position to dare could have ventured far, and would certainly have met with no opposition to his temerity. But then several chapters of this romance would have had to be omitted.

I used to remain one or two hours with her without ever leaving her hand which I had laid on the blankets. We talked interminably, for although Rosette was greatly preoccupied with her love, she believed to be too certain of her final success to retain some of her freedom and liveliness of spirit. From time to time her passion was casting on her gaiety a transparent veil of sweet melancholy, which contributed more to her sparkling charms.

Indeed it would have been an unheard of thing for a young fellow, as I appeared to be, not to esteem himself really very lucky to meet such good fortune, and make the best use of it. Rosette was not used to harsh treatment, and in her

ignorance of my real position, she relied on her own charms and on my youth, even though my love was not hers.

However as this situation seemed to be prolonged beyond its natural limits, she began to worry and in spite of my redoubled efforts through flattering compliments, I could hardly bring her back to her original confidence. Two things in me surprised her, and she noticed in my conduct some contradictions which she could not reconcile: the warmth of my words and the coldness of my actions.

You know it better than anyone else my dear Graciosa my friendship has all the characteristics of a passion. It is quick, ardent and exclusive, even to jealousy, and I had for Rosette nearly as much friendship as I have for you. It was possible for Rosette to be misled. She was all the more deceived owing to my manly costume, which did not allow her to have any other idea.

As I have never loved any man, the excess of my overflowing tenderness is to some extent poured out in my friendliness with young girls. I put into it the same recklessness and the same exaltation as I do in anything, specially when the heart is concerned. In my opinion, people can only belong to one or the other of two classes: those I love, and those I loathe. To me the others do not exist and I would let my horse trample on them quite easily. To me they are no better than cobble-stones.

I am naturally expansive, and I have caressing ways. Sometimes, forgetful of the import of such demonstrations, I passed my arm around Rosette's waist while strolling with her, as I used to do with you, or else, bending over the back of her chair while she was doing embroidery, I rolled on my fingers the downy locks which covered her round, plump neck, or polished with my hand her beautiful tresses to give them additional lustre.

She never attributed these caresses to mere friendship.

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Friendship as ordinarily conceived, does not go so far. Yet seeing I was not proceeding any further, she was surprised and did not know what to make of it. She must have thought my reserve was due to excessive timidity on my part, on account of my extreme youth and my consequent inexperience in affairs of love; and that I only needed encouragement through all sorts of advances and kindly indulgences.

Consequently she was providing numerous opportunities for a *tete-a-tete* in places likely to embolden me by their solitude and distance, and freedom from all noises and interruptions. She took me for long walks in the woods to try on me whether the voluptuous fancies and amorous desires infused into tender souls by the hospitable leafy shade of the forest could not affect me for her benefit.

One day, after making me wander about for a long while through a very picturesque park which extended far behind the chateau and which, excepting the part near the house, was quite strange to me, she led me by a meandering path bordered with elders and nut-trees, to an ancient cottage. This structure was built from trunks of trees with a roof made of reeds, and a door made of five or six rough-hewn planks, the crevices of which were filled up with moss and wild plants. Close to it, between the green roots of the mighty ash-trees with silvery bark stained here and there with black spots, a large spring flowed, and a few steps farther, two marble steps led into a pool full of emerald-green watercress. In those places which were devoid of foliage, fine, snow-white sand could be seen. The water was transparent like crystal and icy cold. Springing from the earth and never being exposed to the tiniest ray of sunlight in these impenetrable shades, it had no opportunity to get stirred or warmed. In spite of their crudity, I love spring water, and finding it so limpid, I could not resist the desire to drink it.

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We arrived in this position at the door of the cottage which I pushed open with a kick. I was surprised at the view of the interior which presented itself to my eyes. I at first thought that it would be just a ramshackle, having not much comfort or amenities inside. But I was mistaken. It was really a boudoir, furnished with every imaginable elegance. The walls and the mirrors had been decorated with the most romantic scenes from Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, Salmacis and Hermaphrodite, Venus and Adonis, Apollo and Daphne, and other mythological love-scenes, painted in pale lilac on white ground. The piers were made of most delicately carved roses and daisies the hearts of which were golden and the leaves of silver. A silver-edging bordered every piece of furniture, and relieved the soft blue of the hangings. Such colour-scheme was marvellously designed to show off the whiteness and beauty of the skin. A thousand charming curios decorated the mantelpiece, tables, and shelves. There was a royal luxuriance in the sofas and armchairs, which clearly showed that this was not meant to be an anchorite's retreat for austere occupations. The cottage was definitely designed to make it most comfortable.

A beautiful marble clock standing on a finely-inlaid pedestal was facing a large Venetian mirror, in which it was reflected with strangely brilliant effect. Besides, it had stopped, as if the marking of the hours was an irrelevance in this abode where limitations of time were to be forgotten.

I told Resette how pleasing all this refined luxury was, and that I considered it very good taste to conceal it under an appearance of simplicity. I added that I thought very highly of a woman who would wear embroidered petticoats and lace-trimmed chemises beneath plain linen garments; this was a delicate attention towards the lover she had or might have for which he could not be too grateful, for surely

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it was always better to keep a diamond in a nut-shell than a nut in a golden casket.

Rosette, as if to demonstrate her agreement with my views, raised her skirt a little and showed me the border of a petticoat richly embroidered with flowers and leaves. It only rested with myself to have access to more intimate secrets of the beautiful things hidden there. But I did not seek to examine whether the splendour of her chemise was equal to that of the skirt, though it could be assumed that its luxuriousness was no less attractive. Rosette let fall her skirt, surprised at my indifference and sorry for not having the chance to show more. Still this exhibition had served to display the beginnings of a perfectly moulded calf, which gave out the utmost promise for the upper part. Her leg which she stretched forward to display her underskirt was really marvellous in shape and gracefulness in its pearl grey silk stocking, tight and well-fitting; and the tiny slipper ornamented with a bow resembled Cinderella's glass slipper. I paid the highest and the most sincere compliments, commenting that a prettier limb and a smaller and more shapely foot could hardly exist. To this she replied with a charming ingenuousness "that is quite true."

Then she proceeded to a panel in the wall, and took out a flask of liqueur and a few plates of cakes and sweets, placed them all upon a small table, and sat down by my side upon a chair which was so narrow that, to avoid discomfort, I was obliged to encircle her waist in my arms. As her hands were free, she poured out the drinks and helped me to the sweets. But seeing me that I was awkward in my movements, she said: "Come, never mind; I will feed you, dear child, as you cannot feed yourself." And she raised the food to my mouth, and forced me to swallow it more quickly than I would have liked. She pushed it in with her pretty fingers, exactly in the manner birds are fed when they

are being crammed; and this made her laugh. I could hardly help kissing her fingers; and she, with a view to give me a better opportunity to kiss the right spot, patted my mouth two or three times with the back of her hand. We took a few glasses of Canary wine, not much certainly—but enough to excite two women not used to drinks. Rosette leaned back upon my arm amorously. She had taken off her cloak, and I could see the beginnings of her breasts which were raised up by her arched position. Their tint was ravishingly delicate and transparent: their shape was slender and at the same time wonderfully firm. I contemplated her for some time with an indefinable emotion and pleasure; and I began to think that men were more fortunate than we were, in their love affairs, that we gave them access to our most alluring treasures, while they had nothing like them to offer us. How deliciously pleasing it must be to caress with lips, such a fine, polished skin and such rounded contours, which seem to come to meet the kiss half-way and to provoke it! This delicate flesh of satin, these wavy lines which envelop one another, the hair so silky and soft to the touch; what inexhaustible incentives they are for liveliest pleasures which men cannot provide for us! Our caresses can hardly be but passive, and yet there is so much more happiness in giving than in receiving!

I should not have certainly made such remarks a year ago and I could have looked at all the breasts and shoulders in the world with indifference, whether they were finely shaped or not. But since I have discarded the attire of my sex and spent my days with men, a sentiment which was unknown to me, has developed in me—the sentiment of beauty. Women are generally bereft of it. I do not know the reason why, as it would appear natural that the women would be better judges of it than men. But as they themselves possess it and the proper knowledge of oneself is the

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most difficult thing in the world, it is therefore not surprising that they do not understand it. Usually if a woman considers another very pretty, you may be certain that the latter is extremely ugly, and no man would pay any attention to her. On the other hand, all women whose beauty and grace are appreciated by men are unanimously considered abominable by the petticoat-assembly. They make endless comments which are usually uncharitable. If I were what I appear to be, I would accept no other guide in my selection—women's disapprobation would serve as a true testimony of beauty.

Now I love and judge beauty; the dress I wear separates me from my sex, and dismisses any idea of rivalry. I am even in a better position to judge than anyone else. I am no longer a woman, but not yet a man, and insensate desire will never blind me into making idols of worthless dummies. I can discern in a cool, unprejudiced way, and my position is as perfectly disinterested as possible.

The length and fineness of the eyelashes, the transparence of the temples, the modelling of the ear, the tone and quality of the hair, the aristocratic shape of the feet and the hands, a thousand and one details which I did not notice before and which constitute real beauty and betoken good breeding—all these guide me in my appreciation; and they are unmistakable. I believe one could easily accept blindfolded any woman of whom I had said—"Really, she is not ugly."

Consequently I am now a better judge of pictures, and although I have not studied profoundly the works of the old masters, I could not be persuaded to appreciate a bad work. I find a strange and profound charm in this study, for as in everything else, moral or physical beauty needs to be studied; it cannot be quickly grasped.

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But to come back to Rosette; from this topic to hers the transition is not an abrupt one.

As I have said, Rosette was reclining on my arm with her head against my shoulder; deep emotion flushed her beautiful cheeks with a delicate rose tint which admirably set off a coquettishly placed black beauty-spot. Her teeth shone through her smiles like rain-drops in the heart of a poppy and her half-closed eyelashes added to the humid brilliance of her large eyes. A ray of sunlight produced a thousand gleaming spangles upon her silky hairs, a few curls of which loosely hung in sorrow upon her plump, round neck to enhance its whiteness. A few little tresses, more wayward and unruly than the others having detached themselves from the rest were twisted in fantastic spirals, and gilded by strange reflexions which, in the light assumed all the colours of the prism. These threads of gold were like the halos which encircle the heads of Madonnas in the old pictures. We were both silent, and I was amused by the sight, beneath the pearly transparencies of her temples, of the little azure veins, and of the tapering of the soft down at the extremities of her eyelashes.

The belle seemed to retire within herself and rock herself in the dreams of infinite sensual pleasure. Her arms were hanging along her sides as undulating and soft as loose sashes. Her head leaned back farther gradually, as if the muscles which sustained it had become too weak to function. She had withdrawn her two tiny feet under her skirt, and had succeeded in wedging herself into the corner of the chair we occupied, so that although it was very narrow there was a wide space on the other side of it.

Her supple, yielding body was moulding itself on mine like wax, following its contour as exactly as possible; water could not have filled the curves more closely. So, resting herself on me she was like the double outlines that painters



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add to their subjects on the shaded side to emphasize them. Only an amorous woman could have such wavy lines and enlacements. In comparison, ivy was far behind her.

The soft warmth of her body penetrated through her clothings and mine. A thousand magnetic streams radiated around her. Her very life seemed to have transferred itself into me after having left altogether. Minute by minute she languished, expired and sank down more and more. A light perspiration was shining on her glossy brow; her eyes moistened, and two or three times she made a movement as if to raise her hands to hide them. But her weary arms fell back half-way upon her knees, and she did not succeed. A big drop of tear overflowed from her eyes, and trickled down her burning cheeks, where it was soon absorbed.

My situation became most embarrassing and ridiculous enough. I felt I must have looked extremely stupid, and this annoyed me terribly, although it was not in my power to alter it. Any bold initiative was denied to me, though the situation demanded it. I was too certain of meeting with no resistance to run the risk, and really I was at a loss to decide what to do. Gallantries and madrigals might have sufficed at the beginning, but nothing would appear more insipid at this stage. To get up and go out would have been awfully rude, and moreover, I am not sure that Rosette would not have played the part of Potiphar's wife and would have detained me by the corner of my cloak. I had no virtuous motive in resisting her, and then to my utter shame, I must admit that this scene, however equivocal might have been my character in it, was not without a certain charm for me. That burning passion was warming me up with its flame, and I was really angry with myself for my inability to quench it. I even desired to be a man as effectively as I appeared in my disguise, to reciprocate her love, and I deeply regretted that Rosette was mistaken. My breathing

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quicken, I felt the red hot blushes surging up to my face, and I was hardly less agitated than my poor, passionate sweetheart. The idea of the similarity of our sexes gradually vanished from my mind, conceding its place to that of a vague sense of pleasure. My glances were veiled, my lips quivered, and if Rosette had been a cavalier instead of being what she was, she could certainly have had her own way with me and how happy should I have been!

At last, unable to contain herself any longer, she got up quickly with a spasmodic movement, and began to pace the room feverishly. Then she stopped in front of the mirror and readjusted her dishevelled hair. All this time I cut a ridiculous figure, and I hardly knew what an attitude I should pose. She stopped in front of me and seemed to be reflecting.

She thought that a senseless timidity alone restrained me, and that I was more of a school boy than she had at first believed. Excited by her terrific, uncontrolled passion, she was determined to make a supreme effort. She was prepared to risk everything to gain her objective.

She approached me, and quicker than lightning, she planted herself upon my knees, passed her arms around my neck, clasped her hands behind my head, and her mouth seized mine in a furious kiss. I felt her bare bosom in revolt against my breast, and her entwined fingers twitched in my hair. A peculiar tremor ran through the whole of my body.

Rosette did not leave my mouth. Her lips enveloped mine, her teeth touched and struck my teeth, our breaths mixed together. I recoiled for an instant, and turned away my head two or three times to avoid her kisses. But an invincible attraction drew me and I returned her kisses as ardently as I received them. // I hardly know how the whole thing would have ended if a loud barking had not sounded

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just outside the door with a noise of scratching feet. The door gave way, and a beautiful white greyhound entered the cottage, yelping and gambolling. Rosette got up at once and ran to the other end of the room. The hound was leaping with joy around her, and tried to reach her hands to lick them. She was so much agitated that she could hardly readjust her cloak on her shoulders.

This hound was the pet of her brother Alcibiades; it never left him, and when it was seen anywhere it was certain that the master was not far away; that was the reason poor Rosette was so frightened.

A moment later Alcibiades himself came in with his spurs on and a whip in hand. "Ah! here you are then," he said. "I have been looking for you for more than an hour, and if my good dog Smug had not found you out I should certainly never have come to your hiding place." He cast a half-serious, half-playful glance at his sister which made her blush up to the whites of her eyes. "You have evidently some very thorny subjects to discuss in the profound solitude of this retreat! You were, no doubt, discussing theology and the dual nature of the soul!"

"Oh, no; our occupation was hardly as sublime as that. We were eating sweets and talking fashions, that's all."

"I do not believe it. You seemed to me to be deeply engrossed in some sentimental dissertation; but to distract you from your nebulous and obscure conversations, it will, I think, be well if you join me in a ride. I want to try a new mare. You too will mount her, Theodore, and we shall see what she is like."

We all three left the cottage, Alcibiades giving me his arms while I gave mine to Rosette. The expressions on our faces were strangely varied. Alcibiades looked pensive, I was quite at my ease and Rosette was exceedingly ill-tempered.

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Alcibiades' arrival on the scene had been very opportune for me, but very inopportune for Rosette who lost, or so she thought, through it, all the reward of her attacks and her ingenious tactics. Had he come a quarter of an hour later, nobody can say what would have been the outcome of this episode. Perhaps it might have been better if he had not intervened precisely at the crucial moment; the situation must have reached a climax in one way or other. During that scene I was tempted, two or three times, to confess to Rosette who and what I was; but the fear of being taken for an adventuress and of seeing my secret divulged kept back from my lips the words which they were ready to utter.

Such a state of affairs could not last. My departure was the only way to cut short this intrigue which had no real purpose. So, at dinner I officially announced that I should leave the following day. Rosette who was sitting next to me, nearly fainted on hearing my statement, and her glass dropped down from her hand. Pallor suddenly overspread her pretty face, and she gave me a reproachful look which moved and agitated me as much as she was.

The aunt raised her wrinkled hands in painful surprise, and in a shrill, trembling voice said: "Oh! my dear Theodore! surely you are not going to leave us like that? It is not kind of you. Yesterday you showed not the slightest inclination to leave us. No mail has yet come to-day, so you cannot have received any letter, and you have, therefore, no excuse to go. You promised us another fortnight of your stay here and now you are going to disappoint us; it is not right of you to do so. You cannot go back on your word. See Rosette's face, and how glad she will be if you do stay. I warn you that I desire it as much as she does, and that I shall pull just as long a face, and at sixty-eight that is a great deal more frightful than at twenty-three, I can tell you. See what you are exposing yourself to; to the aunt's wrath in

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addition to the niece's—and all for some caprice which has seized you between the cheese and the desert.”

Alcibiades, on his part, swore striking a heavy blow on the table with his fist, that he would barricade the gates of the chateau and hamstring my horse rather than let me go.

Rosette threw at me another glance so sad and supplicating that it would have needed the ferocity of a famished tiger, not to have been touched. I could not resist, and although it annoyed me considerably to do so, I gave solemn promise to stay. Dear Rosette would gladly have clung to my neck and kissed me, when she heard this. Alcibiades grasped my hand and shook it so violently that he nearly dislocated my shoulder, and cut my fingers rather deeply. The old lady celebrated the occasion with an immense pinch of snuff.

But still Rosette had not renewed her spirits. The idea that I could go away and that I desired to do so, an idea that had never been brought clearly to her mind, threw her into a profound reverie. The healthy colour which the news of my departure had driven away from her cheeks did not come back in its original brightness; she was still pale of face, and uneasy at heart. My behaviour towards her puzzled her more and more. After the pronounced advances she made to me, she could not understand the motives which led me to exercise so much reserve towards her. She desired to bring me, before my departure, to a clear understanding and bind me to a promise, never doubting that afterwards it would be easy to retain me as long as she wished.

In that respect she was sensible. Had I not been a woman her calculation would have been correct, for whatever may be said about the satiety of pleasure and the consequent disgust, any man whose heart is sound and who is not miserably and incurably blasé, feels his love grow in proportion with his happiness. And very often the best way for

a woman to retain a wavering lover is to give herself to him with complete abandon.

Rosette had designed to commit myself to some thing definite before I left. She knew fully well how difficult it was to resume a liaison at the point where it was snapped off; and she was not certain about meeting me again under such favourable circumstances. Hence she neglected no opportunity of putting me in a position to speak out clearly, leaving the evasive ways under which I used to shield myself. As on my side I had firmly resolved to avoid any such encounter as the one I had in that cottage, and yet I could not, without appearing ridiculous, affect to be cold with Rosette and introduce a virginal prudery into our relations, I hardly knew what attitude I should adopt. I avoided being alone with her. Rosette, on the contrary, tried her best to find me alone; she succeeded often, the Chateau being far away from the town and not much frequented by the gentry of the neighbourhood. She could not understand this secret resistance of mine which perplexed and saddened her. At times she had doubts and hesitations as to the potency of her charms, and seeing herself so inadequately loved, she even wondered whether she was ugly. Then she redoubled her attentions to toilet and conquest; and although her mourning did not allow her full freedom, she still managed to adorn herself; she changed her dress in so clever a way that every day she seemed to grow more charming. She tried everything; she was alternately gay and melancholy, tender and passionate, coquettish and even simpering. She donned one after another all those masks which suit women so well that one does not know whether they are real or assumed. She successively adopted eight or ten different personalities, each contrasting with the other, with a view to ascertain which of

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them I would prefer. She made herself a complete seraglio for me, and all I had to do was to throw the handkerchief; but naturally it was all in vain.

The failure of these stratagems cast a deep gloom on her mind; she fell into a profound stupor. Her beauty was ravishing enough to turn the head of Nestor or melt the icy heart of the chaste Hippolyte himself, and I could not compete with either. I am a youth with a haughty and masculine look, speaking out boldly and always bearing a firm and determined countenance when I was not alone with her.

She must have believed that all the sorcerers of Thrace and Thessaly had applied their charms on me or at least I was sexually unfit. However it seems that this idea did not occur to her, and she attributed my coldness to lack of love towards her.

Days passed and her affairs did not progress; and that affected her visibly. An expression of uneasy moroseness had replaced the blooming smiles upon her lips. The corner of her mouth which had been so gaily curved, had drooped appreciably, and formed a stern and serious line. A few little veins became conspicuous on her eyelids; her cheeks which had been so peach-like, now only preserved their velvety softness. Often from my window I saw her cross the garden in her dressing gown; she walked hardly raising her feet, as if she had been skating, with her two arms crossed upon her breast, her head lowered, more bent than a branch of weeping willow over the brook, and with a heavy and undulating motion like that of a drapery which was too long and trailed on the floor.

In these moments she looked like one of those amorous women of classical mythology, a victim of the wrath of Venus whom that ruthless goddess had furiously attacked. When I saw her in this state I could picture to myself Psyche after she had lost Cupid.

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The days when she did not force herself to conquer my coldness and hesitation, her love had a simple and primitive charm which fascinated me. There was in it a silent and trusting abandon, a chaste ease in caresses, and an inexhaustible abundance and plenitude of heart, in fact all the treasures of a beautiful nature bestowed unstintedly. She was free from the petty meannesses so common in the best of woman ; she did not make any effort at disguise, but allowed me to see the full extent of her love. Never for a moment her self-respect did not revolt when I failed to respond to her advances, for pride leaves the heart the day love enters ; and if anyone were ever truly loved it was I. She suffered, but without complaint or bitterness, blaming only herself for the failure of her efforts. Yet her pallor, however, increased day by day, lilies had fought and routed the roses from her cheeks. It pained me to see this, but I had no power to help her. The more I spoke to her sweetly and affectionately, the more caressingly I courted her, the deeper I drove into her heart the arrow of impossible love. By consoling her to-day, I was preparing for her a much more terrible despair for the next day. My remedies poisoned her wound while seeming to stanch it. I repented of all the charming things I had said to her, and my great sympathy for her urged me to discover a way to make her hate me.

I tried two or three times to be harsh with her, but I promptly returned to my madrigals, for I was less afraid of her smiles than of her tears. On those occasions, although the loyalty of my intention fully absolved me in my conscience, I felt more uneasy, and I experienced a feeling akin to remorse. A tear can only be dried up by a kiss ; one cannot leave such a task to a handkerchief, even if it is made of the finest fabric in the world. So I undid what I had done, the tear was quickly effaced, and was forgotten sooner than the kiss but on my own side it only added to my worry and



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embarrassment. Rosette who observed that I was escaping from her, began to cling with melancholy obstinacy to the remnants of her hope, and my situation was growing more complicated. The strange sensation I experienced in the little cottage and the extraordinary confusion into which I was thrown by the ardent caresses of my beautiful sweetheart, had occurred to me again, though with less violence; and often when sitting near Rosette hand in hand, and listening to her soft cooing, I really imagined that I was a man as she believed me to be, and that it was sheer cruelty on my part to fail to respond to her love.

One evening, by some strange accident, I was alone in the green room with the aged lady. She had in her hand a piece of tapestry, for in spite of her sixty-eight years she never remained idle—wanting, as she said, to finish before her death what she had begun and had been working on for a very long time. Feeling a little fatigued, she put down her work and leant back in her large armchair. She looked at me very closely, and her grey eyes sparkled through her glasses with a peculiar vivacity. She passed her hand two or three times on her wrinkled brow, and fell into a deep thought. The memory of by-gone times and her regrets gave her face an expression of sorrowful emotion. I remained silent for fear of disturbing her musing, and the silence lasted for some moments. At last she broke it.

"They are the very eyes of Henry, my dear Henry; the same bright and moist glance, the same carriage of the head, the same gentle but proud face. You are just like him. You cannot imagine how striking the likeness is, Theodore; when I look at you, I can never believe that Henry is dead. I imagine that he was only out on a long journey and has just returned at last. You have caused me great pleasure and great pain, Theodore; pleasure in reminding me of my poor Henry, pain in showing me how great my loss has been.

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Sometimes I have taken you for his spirit. I cannot reconcile myself to the idea that you are going to leave us one of these days ; it seems to me as if I was losing my Henry again."

I replied that if it were possible for me to stay longer I would do so with the greatest pleasure ; but that my sojourn had already extened beyond its limit, and that moreover, I proposed to return as the chateau would leave me with memories too agreeable to allow me to forget them.

"However sorry I may be at your departure, Theodore," she went on, following up her idea, "there is some one here who will be still more so. You know whom I mean. I do not know what we shall do with Rosette after you have gone. Now this old chateau is very desolate. Alcibiades is always away a-hunting, and for a young woman, the society of a poor old invalid like myself is not very cheerful."

"If anyone ought to regret, it is not you, Madam, nor Rosette, but myself. You will lose little ; I very much indeed. You will easily find more entertaining society than mine, but it is more than doubtful if I can ever replace Rosette's and yours."

"I do not wish to quarrel with your modesty, my dear Monsieur, but I know the fact and I am speaking from my knowledge. It is very probable that we shall not see Madame Rosette in good humour for a long time to come, as you alone are in a position to create sunshine or rain on her, cheeks. Her period of mourning will soon be over, and it will be a great pity, if she takes off her gaiety along with her last black dress. That would set a very bad example, quite contrary to the ordinary rules. Now you can prevent all that without much ado, and I have no doubt you will do it," said the old lady, laying an emphatic stress on her last words.

"Certainly I will do my best, so that your niece may preserve her natural gaiety, since you credit me with so much influence over her. Still, I hardly see how I am to do it."

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"Oh, you hardly see! Of what use are your beautiful eyes? I never thought you were so short of sight. Rosette is free, she has an income of eighty thousand francs by her own right; and that would make hideously ugly women appear beautiful. You are young, handsome and I think, unmarried. It all seems to me the simplest proposition in the world, unless you have an extreme repulsion for Rosette, which I can hardly bring myself to believe."—"That is not, and cannot be; for her soul is well matched with her body. She is one of those who could be ugly without its being noticed and who are not desired to be otherwise."

"She could be ugly with impunity, and yet she is charming; that is a double reason. I do not doubt your word. But she has taken the wiser alternative. On her part I would willingly answer that there are a thousand persons she dislikes more than she does you, and if asked several times she would perhaps end by admitting that you did not exactly displease her. You have on your finger a ring which would fit her perfectly, for your hand is nearly as small as hers, and I am convinced she would accept it with pleasure."

The good lady stopped to see the effect her words produced upon me and I do not know if she was satisfied with the expression of my face. I was terribly embarrassed, and was at a loss for an answer. From the outset, I had noticed where her insinuations were leading, and although I had expected the words she had just uttered, I remained surprised and abashed. My only course was a refusal, but what reasonable argument could I advance for it? I had none, except that I was a woman. That was, it is true, an excellent reason, but exactly the one it was not possible for me to state.

I could hardly allege that I had ferocious or ridiculous parents, and no parents would fail to be taken in by the prospects of my marrying Rosette. Had she not been what she

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was, good, beautiful and well-born, her incomes of eighty thousand francs would have swept away all obstacles.

To say that I did not love her would have been neither true nor honourable, for really I loved her fondly, much more than a woman ever loves a woman. I was too young to pretend that I was already engaged. The best excuse I could adduce was that, being the youngest member of the family, the interests of my family required me to join the Order of Mala, and did not permit me to think of marriage; it caused me the greatest disappointment and grief since I had seen Rosette.

The reply was not at all convincing and I knew it. The old lady was not duped, and she did not take it as a definite and final answer; she thought I had put forward this excuse just to gain some time to reflect and to consult my parents. She took it for granted such an alliance was so unexpectedly advantageous for me that it was impossible for me to refuse, even had I not been in love with Rosette; it was such a piece of good fortune that it could not be ignored.

I do not know whether the aunt made the overtures at the instance of her niece; but I am inclined to think that Rosette had no hand in it. She loved me too simply and ardently to think of anything but her immediate possession of me; and marriage would certainly have been the last method she would have employed. The dwager who must have watched our intimacy and undoubtedly believed it had gone much further than it really did, had arranged the little plan to make me stay with her and replace, as much as possible, her son Henry, who was killed in war, to whom she considered I bore such a striking likeness. She was delighted with the prospects of such arrangement and taken advantage of that moment of solitude to speak to me. I saw by her manner that she did not consider herself beaten, and that she proposed to return to the charge. This annoyed me extremely.

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Rosette, on her part, made on the same night a final effort which had such serious consequences that I must give a special account of it, for I cannot include it in this letter which has become already far too long. You will see for what strange adventures I was predestined, and how Heaven had designed me to be a heroine of romance. I do not know what moral you would draw from it; but our lives are not like fables, each chapter has not at its end a rhymed line. Very often life just means that it is not death. That is all. Good-bye, dear, with my kisses on your beautiful eyes. You will soon receive the next instalment of my triumphant autobiography.

### XIII

THEODORE—Rosalind—for I know not how to call you—I saw you a little while ago, and I am writing to you. How I wish to know your real name! It must be sweet as honey, and it would hover on the lips more softly and harmoniously than poesy!

I have never dared to say that to you, and I would have been dead if I had not told you. Nobody knows nor will understand what I have suffered. I myself could only give you a feeble idea; words fail to express my anguish.

O Rosalind, I love you! I adore you! Why is there no more powerful and expressive word to describe my feelings! Never have I loved, never have I adored any one but you. I prostrate myself, I humble myself, before you, and I would force all creation to bend its knees before my idol. To me you are more than all nature, more than myself, more than God. It seems strange to me that God Himself has not come down from high Heaven to be your slave. Where you are not all is desert, all is death, all a total void; you alone

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people the world for me ; you are the life, the sun—you are all and everything. Your smile makes the day, your gloom the night ; the spheres follow the movements of your body, and the celestial harmonies dance on your rhythm. O my beautiful dream, transformed into reality ! You are clothed in splendour, and you are swimming endlessly in floods of effulgent radiance.

It is just three months since I first met you ; but I have loved you long before. Before I could see you, I languished of love for you. I called you, I sought for you, and I despaired of ever meeting you on the way, for I knew that I could never love another woman. How many times have you appeared to me at the window of the mysterious castle leaning sadly on the balcony and casting to the winds the petals of some flower—or else, petulant Amazon, on your Turkish steed, whiter than snow, galloping along the sombre avenues of the forest ! How charmingly beautiful you were, with your soft, confiding eyes, diaphanous hands, your lovely, wavy hair, and your veiled smile, so adorably disdainful ! Only you were less handsome, as the most ardent and uncontrolled imagination of a painter or a poet cannot attain to the sublime poetry of the reality. There is in you an inexhaustible source of grace, a fountain eternally gushing forth irresistible seductions. You are a constantly replenished casket full of most precious pearls ; in your slightest movements ; in your most absent-minded gestures, in your most abandoned postures, you throw at every moment, in royal profusion, inestimable treasures of beauty. If the soft undulations of contour, if the fugitive lines of an attitude could be fixed and conserved in a mirror, the glasses before which you have passed would throw into scorn the most divine canvases of Raphael and make them look like ignoble signs of public houses. Every gesture, each toss of the head, every aspect of your beauty is engraved on the mirror

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of my soul with a diamond point, and nothing in the world will be able to efface the profound impression. I know in which place was the shadow, and in which place was the light, the spots where light shone forth and where the errant reflexion was melting into the softer tints of your neck and the cheeks. I could delineate you even when you are absent; your ideal pose is eternally present before me. As a child I stood for hours before the pictures of the old masters and examined with avidity the dark depths. I gazed at the beautiful figures of saints and of goddesses, whose ivory-white flesh stood out so marvellously from obscure backgrounds carbonized by the decomposition of the pigments. I admired the simplicity and magnificence of their figures, the strange grace of their hands and their feet, the pride and beauty of their features, the grandeur of their draperies clinging about their divine forms, the purple folds of which seemed to stretch themselves to embrace their lovely bodies. I started so intently at these paintings veiled by the smoke of centuries, that my vision was blurred, the outlines were dimmed and a sort of still and dead life animated all these pale phantoms of vanished beauties. I ended by discovering that all these figures had a vague resemblance to the beautiful unknown woman whom I adored from the bottom of my heart. I sighed at the thought that the woman I was to love was perhaps one of them, and had probably been dead these three hundred years. That idea often affected me to such a degree that it made me weep, and I railed against myself in great wrath for not having been born in the sixteenth century when all these beauties had lived. I found it was an unpardonable blunder on my part.

As I grew older, the sweet phantom obsessed me still more strongly; I always saw it between my mistresses and myself, smiling ironically and disclaiming human beauty by

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the perfection of her divine charms. It made some really beautiful and pleasant women appear ugly in my eyes. However, I should not have been enamoured of an adorable shadow the actual body of which, I did not believe, could exist, though it was the presentiment of your own beauty. O Rosalind! how unhappy I have been because of you, though I did not know you then. O Theodore! how unhappy you made me feel, once I knew you. If you will, you are able to open to me the paradise of my dreams. You are standing on the threshold like a guardian angel with folded wings, and you hold the golden key in your beautiful hands. Speak, Rosalind, speak will you?

I wait for only one word from you to seal my fate. Will you say it? Are you Apollo, the hunter from heaven, or Aphrodite rising from the bosom of the sea? Where have you left your bejewelled chariot drawn by your horses of fire? What have you done with your pearl shells and your blue-tailed dolphins? What amorous nymph has melted her body into yours in the closest embrace? O handsome young man, you are more ravishing than Adonis, more adorable than all women.

But you are a woman; the age of metamorphoses is now past—Adonis and Hermaphrodite are dead. No longer any man can attain the perfection of beauty, for since heroes and gods are no more, you women alone conserve in your body of marble as in Greek temples the precious gift of form anathematized by Christianity, and you alone show that the earth has nothing to envy heaven. You so worthily represent the first earthly divinity, the purest symbol of eternal essence—beauty.

Since I have seen you, something has been torn up in me, a veil has fallen down, a door has opened itself. I have felt myself flooded inwardly by many waves of light. I have understood that my life was standing before me, and that I



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have at last arrived at the decisive crossroads. The lines obscured and lost in the partly shaded faces that I sought to distinguish from the shadow have been suddenly illuminated. The brown patches which blurred the background of the picture are softly lighted; a tender rosy glow has spread over the sea which is a little green in the distance. Trees which only formed confused silhouettes, have begun to get sharply defined. Flowers, moistened with dew, have adorned the dull green meadow with brilliant paints of light. I have seen the bullfinch with its scarlet breast at the edge of a branch of elder, the little white rabbit with red eyes, straight ears, which pokes its head between two blades of thyme, brushing its muzzle with its paw, and the timid stag which comes to drink at the brook and admires the reflection of its horns in the water. From the morning when the sun of love rose on my life, everything has changed; where once flickered in the shadows some indefinite sinister forms rendered all the more terrible and monstrous by their vagueness, I can now see rows of trees in flower, hillocks forming a graceful amphitheatre, silver terraces strewn with vases and statues bathing their feet in azure lakes and appearing to swim between two heavens. What I mistook in the dark for a gigantic dragon with wings armed with claws tearing its way through the night with scaly feet, is really a boat with silken sail and golden oars, full of women and musicians; and that awful crab I believed to be waving above my head its hooks and pincers is but a fan-like palm tree; narrow leave of which are stirred by the nocturnal breeze. My fancies and chimeras have vanished—I am in love.

Despairing of ever finding you, I was accusing my dream of being false, and I quarrelled furiously with fate. I was telling myself that only a mad man would search for such a type of womanhood or else that nature was very sterile and the Creator very inefficient if they could not realize the simple

thought of my heart. Prometheus had the noble ambition to create a man to rival God ; I myself had created a woman, and I believed that as a penalty for my audacity an unsatiable desire gnawed at my liver like another vulture. I apprehended to be chained with steel manacles on a grey rock near the wild ocean ; but the beautiful sea nymphs with their long green hair, rising above the waves, their white necks outstretched, and displaying to the sun their bodies of pearl-shell, all sparkling with the tears of the sea, would never have come over to the shore to converse with me and console me in my grief as in the drama of old Aeschylus.

It has not been so.

You have appeared, and I have reproached my imagination for its weakness. My torment has not been as I feared—to be perpetually the prey to an idea on a sterile rock. But I have suffered no less. I have seen that you exist, that my presentiment has not lied on that point, and you appear to me with the enigmatic and terrifying beauty of the Sphinx. Like Isis, the mysterious goddess, you are enveloped in a veil that I dare not raise from fear of death.

Had you known under my distracted appearance, with what breathless attention and anxiety I observe you and follow you in all your movements ! Nothing escapes me. How ardently I gaze at your neck, wrists and other exposed limbs to ascertain your sex ! Your hands have been to me a subject of profound study, and I can say that their lightest sinuosities, their most imperceptible veins and their tiniest dimples are familiar to me. If you were hidden from head to foot under an impenetrable mask, I could still have recognized you from one of your fingers. I analyze the suppleness of your walk, the peculiar manner in which you place your feet and the style in which you dress your hair. I seek to surprise your secret in the habits of your body. I watch you specially in those moments of relaxation when the bones seem to be detached

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from the body and when the limbs are depressed and pliant as if they were untied, to examine if the feminine contours would be more boldly pronounced in that state of careless oblivion. Never has any person been riddled with glances as you are. I forget myself in such contemplation for hours. Retired in a corner of the lounge with a book in hand that I am not reading, or crouching behind the curtain of my room when you are in yours—and I could see you through the blinds, and much impressed by the marvelous beauty which clings around you like a luminous atmosphere I say to myself: assuredly that is a woman. Then abruptly a bold and brusque movement, a deep, virile accent or some cavalier attitude, destroys in a minute my frail edifice of probabilities, throwing me back again to my former doubts.

Some times I am floating with full sail on the uncharted ocean of amorous musing, and you come to ask me to fence with you or to play tennis. The young maiden transformed into a youthful cavalier would give me hard blows with her weapon or knock out the foil from my hand as nimbly and quickly as the well-trained duellist. Every moment of the day brings me a similar disappointment.

I would venture to address you to-day: my ideal girl, it is you alone I adore. And I would see you tenderly bending to the ear of a lady, whispering through her hair some flattering compliments or madrigals. Judge of my situation! Either a woman whom in my jealousy I would have skinned alive with the greatest pleasure, would hang on your arm and drag you aside for confiding to you some puerile secrets or would detain you for hours in a window-recess.

It enraged me to see women speak to you, for that makes me fear that you might be a man. Even had you been so, I could only have borne it with infinite pain. When young men approach you freely and familiarly, I grow more jealous, because I fear they may have suspected, as I have done, that

you are a woman. I am prey to the most contrary passions and I cannot discover a way out of this dilemma.

I am very much angry with myself. I heap upon myself the bitterest reproaches for having conceived such a strange and abnormal love and for lacking the strength to tear out from my heart that poisonous plant which has sprung up there in a night like a venomous mushroom. I am cursing you, I call you my evil genius. Even once I have believed you are Beelzelub in person, as I could not explain the sensation I experience in your presence. When I was fully persuaded that you were a woman in disguise, the improbability of motives that could have justified such a caprice again plunged me into doubts. I began to deplore again that the one I dreamt of as the love of my soul should belong to my sex. I railed at fate that had made a man of such charming appearance, and to my eternal sorrow had brought us together at a time when I had totally given up the hope of realizing the ideas of pure beauty that I had caressed so long in my heart.

Now, Rosalind, I have the greatest certainty that you are the most beautiful of women. I have seen you in the costume of your sex. I have seen your shoulders, your arms so pure and so properly rounded, and the beginnings of your breasts as exposed by your partially open corsage. And they can only belong to a young girl. Meleager the handsome hunter or the effeminate Bacchus, with their indefinite and dubious forms, had never been gifted with such delicate lines nor with such a fine skin, although both were of Paros marble and were polished by the loving kisses of twenty centuries. I am no longer worried in that regard. But that is not all. You are a woman, and my love is no longer reprehensible. I can then give way to my emotions without remorse and abandon myself to the flood that carries me away towards you. However great and reckless my passion may be, it is permissible ; and I avoid it openly. But you Rosalind, for you I am burning in silence,

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and you are ignorant of the intensity of my love. That revelation is slow in dawning on you ; it is not surprising. Will you be able to love me ? Do you love me ? I know not—I tremble, for I am more unhappy now than before.

Sometimes I believe that you do not hate me. When you acted in *As You Like It*, you had given to certain parts of your role a special emphasis which lent an additional meaning and which, in a way encouraged me to declare myself. I believe to have seen in your eyes and in your smiles some gracious promises of indulgence, and felt your hand respond to the pressure of mine. But if I was deceived ! O God ! That is a possibility over which I dare not to ponder ! Encouraged by all that and urged on by my love I have written to you, for your dress does not provoke such confessions and a thousand times have the words stopped on my lips, even when I have the firm conviction that you are a woman. Your manly dress shocked all my tender, loving sentiments, and held back their flight towards you.

I beg of you, Rosalind, try to love me if you do not love me as yet. Do not condemn the rest of my life to deep despair and to gloomy discouragements. Remember that I have adored you ever since I began to think that you were revealed to me before and that when I was a child, you have appeared to me in dreams with a crown of dew-drops, two crystalline wings and a little blue flower in your hand ; that you are the end, the means and *raison d'être* of my life ; that without you I am nothing but a vain apparition ; if you blow out the flame you have kindled, then there will remain of me only a inch of dust finer and more impalpable than that which rests in the wings of Death. Rosalind, you know so many recipes or healing love-sickness ; heal me, for I am very seriously ill. Play your role till the end. Cast off the clothing of the beautiful Ganymede, and hold out your white hand to the youngest son of the brave knight, Roland de Bois.

## XIV

I WAS at my window gazing at the stars which were twinkling gaily in the flower-gardens of heaven, and inhaling the sweet perfume of the night wafted to me by the dying breeze. The wind had blown out my light, the last to be seen burning in the chateau. My thoughts degenerated into a vague and incoherent reverie, and a sort of somnolence overtook me. However, I remained leaning on the balustrade, fascinated by the charm of the night. Rosette, finding my lamp no longer burning and unable to see me because there was a large angle of shadow precisely over my window, had no doubt assumed that I was in bed ; and this is what she had been waiting for to risk a last, desperate attempt. She pushed the door so softly that I did not hear her come in, and she was only two steps from me when I saw her. She was surprised at seeing me still up ; but quickly recovering herself she came to me and took my arm, and called me : "Theodore ! Theodore !"

"What, you Rosette, here at this hour, all alone in such deshabelle !"

I must mention that the belle only wore a night-gown made of the flimsiest fabric. Her arms, mouth and neck were entirely bare, and the clothes covering her body were as fine and diaphanous that I could see the tips of her breasts as in those statues of bathing women.

"Is that a reproach, Theodore ? Or just a simple exclamation ? Yes, me, Rosette, the beautiful lady, here in your room and not in mine where I ought to be at eleven o'clock or perhaps midnight, without any chaperone, duenna or a maid—and almost nude, only wearing bed-clothes ! This is so very strange, is it not ? It surprises me as much, too, and I do not know how to explain it to you."

With these words she passed her arm around my waist,

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and let herself fall on my bed in such a way as to drop me down with her.

"Rosette," I said trying to disengage myself, "I must light the lamp, nothing is more gloomy than a dark room. And it is as bad as murder when you are so close and one is deprived of the sight of your beauty. Permit me to kindle a miniature sun by means of matches and tinder, to illuminate all that the jealous night tries to hide under her shadows."

"That is not worth the trouble. I would prefer you not to see my blushes. I feel my cheeks all burning, for I am dying of shame!"

She pressed her face against my breast, and remained thus for several minutes, as though choking with emotion. During this time I was passing mechanically my fingers through the long curls of her hair. I sought in my brain some honourable way to escape from this embarrassing situation. Rosette was determined not to retire from the room. Her clothes were in such disorder that they augured nothing good. I myself was only wearing a dressing-gown with open neck, which very poorly protected my incognito. I was very worried how this scene was going to end.

"Listen Theodore," said Rosette rising, and bringing her hair down on both sides of her face as far as I could see by the dim light provided by the stars and the tiny crescent of the moon which had just commenced to rise.

"The step I have taken is a strange one; the whole world would blame me for having done it. But you are leaving soon and I love you. I cannot let you go without an explanation. Perhaps you will never come back and I may never see you again. Who knows where you will go? But wherever you may go, you will take away my soul and my life with you. Had you stayed here, I should not have been reduced to this extremity. The pleasure of contemplating you, of hearing you and of living by the side of you, would have fully satisfied me;

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I would not have asked anything more. I would have shut my love in the sanctuary of my heart, and you would only have seen in me a dear and sincere friend. But that cannot be, you say you are compelled to leave. It annoys you, Theodore, in fact, to see me so tied up to you as an amorous shadow that you cannot shake off and that wants to melt itself into your body. It must be unpleasant to you ever to see behind you the pleading eyes and hands held out to seize the border of your mantle. I know it, but I cannot help it. Besides you cannot complain, as the fault is yours. I was calm, tranquil, and almost happy before I knew you. Then you arrived, handsome, young, smiling like charming Phoebus. You have paid me the most impressive and delicate attentions. Never was a cavalier more spiritual and gallant ! From your lips at every minute fell roses and rubies—everything became for you a chance to compose a madrigal and you know how to turn the most insignificant phrase into an adorable compliment. Even a woman who at first mortally hated you, would finish by loving you, and I have loved you from the moment I saw you. Why, then, after being so amiable, did it surprise you to be loved ? Is it not the most natural consequence ? I am neither mad nor thoughtless ; I am not a little romantic girl who falls in love with the first swordsman she sees. I have seen the world, I have seen life. What I am doing, all women, even the most prudish and the most virtuous, would do as much. What were your ideas and intentions ? To please me, I imagine, for I cannot suppose anything else. Then why is it that you are so sorrowful to have succeeded ? If I have done anything unwittingly that has displeased you, I ask your pardon. Is it that you do not find me pretty enough or have you detected in me any defect ? You have every right to be exacting where beauty is concerned. But you have lied so capriciously, if I am not beautiful. I am as youthful as you are, and I love you. Why now



do you disdain me ? You were so courteously treating me, you held my arm with such constant solicitude, you pressed so tenderly the hand that I surrendered to you, you looked at me with such languorous eyes. If you did not really love me, why is all this sham ? Would you by chance be so cruel as to kindle love in a heart only to turn it into an object of mockery ? Ah ! that would be a dreadful joke, an impiety, a sacrilege ! That would only amuse a perverse mind, and I could not believe it of you, however strange your behaviour may seem. What is then the cause of this sudden transformation ? I am unable to discover any clue. What mystery is hidden behind your frigidity ? I cannot believe you have a loathing for me ; what you have done proves the contrary, for one cannot court so warmly a woman whom he despises. To do so one would require to be the most infamous knave on earth. O Theodore ! what is your grievance against me ? What have I done to you ? If the love you appeared to have for me has flown away, mine, alas ! still remains, and I cannot tear it away from my heart. Do have pity on me, Theodore, for I am very miserable. Do at least pretend to love me a little, and speak to me a few soft words that will not cost you much, unless you have towards me an insuperable horror...."

She broke into tears, her sobs completely choked her voice. She crossed her two hands on my shoulders and laid her forehead on it in a most forlorn attitude. All that she had said was not more than just, and it was all unanswerable. I was not able to take a bantering tone, that would have been most improper. Besides, Rosette was not a woman who could be so lightly treated. I was, moreover, too deeply moved to do

I felt very guilty to have so trifled with the heart of so charming a person. I suffered the pangs of very deep and sincere remorse for it. Seeing that I gave no answer, the poor dear child heaved a long sigh and attempted to rise, but she collapsed under her emotion. Then she wrapped me in her

arms ; her cool freshness penetrated through my night-gown. She laid her face against mine, and began to weep in silence. It gave me a peculiar sensation when I felt on my cheek that steady stream of tears. Before long mine were mingling with hers ; and that was a truly bitter shower, copious enough to cause a new deluge, if it had lasted only forty days.

The moon at that instant shone precisely on the windows ; a single pale ray entered into the room and spread a faint blue light over our silent group. With her white gown, her bare arms, her uncovered bosom, her dishevelled hair and dolorous looks, Rosette had the appearance of an alabaster statue of Melancholy seated on a tombstone. As for me I know not how I looked, as I had no mirror with me. But I think I could have been taken as a model for a picture of Indecision.

I was deeply moved, and I fondled Rosette more tenderly than I have ever done before. From her hair my hand had slipped down to her velvety neck, and from there to her round and polished shoulders ; and when I followed its tremulous line, the child was vibrating under my touch like a keyboard under the fingers of a musician. Her flesh was quivering, and amorous shivers ran all over her body. I was experiencing a vague and confused desire, which I was not able to analyze, and I felt a great voluptuousness in caressing her pure and delicate features. I left her shoulder, and profiting by the opening of a fold I suddenly enclosed in my hand her small scared breasts which throbbed in nervous distraction like a dove surprised in her nest. From the extreme end of her cheek which I brushed with a gentle kiss, I reached her half-open mouth. We remained thus for some time, though I could not say whether it lasted two minutes or a quarter of an hour or one hour ; for I had totally lost all notion of time, and I knew not if I was in heaven or on earth, here or elsewhere, dead or living. The delicious wine of pleasure had so deeply intoxicated me at the first sip that the last vestige of

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my reason was gone. Rosette embraced me still more tightly and enveloped all my body. She leaned on me convulsively pressing me to her bare and panting bosom. With each passionate kiss her life seemed to rush to the spot my lips had touched and to leave the rest of her body. Strange and fantastic ideas crossed my brain. Had I not been afraid of betraying my disguise I would have responded freely to Rosette's impassioned impulses, and perhaps would have made some vain and foolish attempts to give an appearance of reality to that shadow of pleasure that my beautiful lover embraced with such ardour. I had not yet had a lover, and those lovely assaults, those reiterated caresses, those sweet kisses disturbed and excited me in the extreme, even though they emanated from a woman; and then this nocturnal visit, this romantic passion, and the soft moonlight all had for me a sweet freshness and a charm of novelty which made me forget for a moment that, after all, I was not a man.

However, with a great effort to control myself, I told Rosette that she was seriously compromising her reputation by coming into my room at such an hour and staying there so long, that her chamber-maids might notice her absence and find out that she had not spent the night in her bed.

I said it so gently that in reply Rosette took off her gown and slippers and slipped into my bed like a serpent in a jar of milk, as she must have imagined that her clothes only stopped me from taking a more definite action.

She thought, poor child, that the happy hour she had striven for so laboriously was going to strike at last for her. But nothing struck at all except two o'clock. She was once more disappointed. My situation became most critical when my door was suddenly opened, and Alcibiades himself appeared on the scene.

He was holding a candle in one hand and a sword in the other.

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He came straight to the bed, and pulling off the covering, held the candle right over the confused face of Rosette. He addressed in a bantering tone, "Good evening, my sister!" Poor little Rosette could not muster sufficient strength to reply to him.

"So it appears, my dear and very virtuous sister, that having judged in your wisdom that Monsieur Theodore's company was more pleasant than your own, you have come to visit him? Or perhaps your bed-room is haunted by ghosts, and so you have thought that you would be safer here under the protection of this young cavalier. All that seems so logical! Ah! Monsieur le Chevalier de Serannes, you have made glad eyes at my sister, and you think that the matter will stop there. I fancy it will not be out of place if I cut your throat a little, and if you will be complaisant enough to agree to it, I shall feel indefinitely obliged to you. You have abused, Theodore, the friendship I had for you, and you make me repent of the good opinion I had formed of your loyalty. It is a great pity."

I was not in a position to defend myself, all the appearances being totally against me. Who would ever have believed if I had said—and it was perfectly true—that Rosette had come into my room against my will, and that far from seeking to please her, I had done all I could to turn her away from me? I had but one reply to give, I said: "Monsieur Alcibiades I am at your disposal, and I will fight when you please."

Meanwhile, Rosette had not failed to faint, the expected thing to do under similar circumstances. I took a crystal cup full of water where I dipped the stem of a white rose and sprinkled a few drops on her face; she soon came round.

Not knowing how to keep her countenance she collapsed beside the bed and buried her pretty head under the bed-cover like a bird preparing to sleep. She had gathered so many

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sheets and cushions around her that it would have been very difficult to guess what was under the heap. Occasional spasmodic sighs alone could have given the clue that it was a young repentant woman, or at least a young woman exceedingly grieved for sinning in intention and not in reality, which was the case of unlucky Rosette.

The brother, no longer uneasy about his sister, resumed the dialogue, and said to me in a softer tone: "It is not absolutely necessary that we should try to cut each other's throats immediately; it is an extreme measure which can be undertaken as a last resort. Listen! the match is not equal, and our chances are not even. You are very young, and much less vigorous than myself. If we fight, I shall possibly kill or maim you; and I would rather not kill nor disfigure you: that would be a great pity. Rosette who is now silently lying down there, would never forgive me for it. She would attempt my life, for she is spiteful, and vindictive as a tigress when she is upset, that dear little dove. You do not know that because you are her Prince Galaor and you only receive nothing but charming sweetness; but when her temper is high she is anything but pleasant. Rosette is free, and so are you. It appears that you are not irreconcilable enemies. Marry her; then she will have no need to go back to spend the rest of the night in her room, and I shall not be under any obligation to strike my sword into your body—that would not be agreeable either for you or for me. What do you think of it?"

I was forced to make a horrible grimace, for what he proposed was the most impracticable of all solutions to the situation. I would sooner try to walk under the ceiling like a fly or to unhook the sun rather than do which he demanded of me. And yet the last proposition sounded more agreeable than the first. He looked surprised that I did not accept it with alacrity, and repeated what he had said, to give me time

to reply. "An alliance with your family would be most honourable for me, and one I had never dared to hope. I know that it would be an inconceivably good fortune for a young man who has neither wealth nor position in this world, while many illustrious persons would gladly accept this offer. But still I must persist in my refusal. Since I have the freedom of choice between a duel and marriage, I prefer the former. That may be an unusual choice but it is mine."

Here Rosette broke into a most painful sob; raising her head from the pillow and quickly dropping it again like a snail, on seeing my impassible and determined face.

"It is not that I do not love Madame Rosette, I love her infinitely, but I have serious reasons for not marrying and you would find them excellent, if it were possible for me to mention them to you. Besides, things have not gone so far between Rosette and myself as appearances suggest; there have been a few kisses between us which a very deep friendship suffices to explain and justify. But there is nothing that we could not confess without shame, and your sister's virtue is perfectly intact. I owed her this testimony. Now at what time do we fight, Monsieur Alcibiades, and at what place?"

"Here and now," cried Alcibiades mad with fury.

"What! in the presence of Rosette?"

"Unsheath your sword, you wretch, or I shall murder you," he continued brandishing his sword and waving it round his head.

"At least let us leave this room."

"If you do not fall in, I shall nail you against the wall as if you were a bat, my pretty Celadon, and no flapping of your wings will free you, I warn you." And he rushed on me with his sword.

I drew out my rapier, as he had meant what he said, and at first I did no more than parry the thrusts he delivered.

Rosette made a superhuman effort to throw herself between our swords as both combatants were equally dear to her. But her strength failed her and she rolled down senseless at the foot of the bed.

Our blades sparkled, making the noise of an anvil for the insufficient space in the room forced us to keep to close quarters. Alcibiades almost reached me two or three times; and if I had not an excellent fencing-master, my life would have been in grave danger as he, with surprising skill and prodigious strength, exhausted all the ruses and feints of fencing in his efforts to strike me. However, he failed to reach me. Enraged at his failure, he uncovered himself several times. I declined to take advantage of it; but he returned to the charge with such relentless and savage fury that I was forced to seize a chance which he gave. And then the noise, flashing and whirling of the steel intoxicated and maddened men; I no longer thought of death. I was not at all afraid; that sharp and deadly blade aimed at me so often made no more impression on me than if I was fighting with the button foils. I was only indignant at the brutality of Alcibiades, and the sentiment of my perfect innocence greatly enhanced my wrath.

I only wanted to prick his waist or shoulder to make him drop his sword, as I had vainly tried to strike his blade out of his grip. He had a wrist of iron, and my efforts were quite navailing. At last he delivered a thrust so fiercely and so low, that I could not ward it off. My sleeve was pierced and I felt the cold steel on my arm, but I was not wounded. It, however, roused my temper, and made me turn defence to attack. I no longer remembered that he was Rosette's brother, and I pounced on him as if he had been my mortal foe. Taking advantage of the wrong position of his sword, I launched a thrust at his flank, it was directed so well that it reached his side. He shouted "Oh", and fell backward.

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I thought he was dead, but he was not really, only wounded. His failure was caused by a false step when retreating. I cannot express, Graciosa, the sensation I then felt. Certainly it is not difficult to reflect that when flesh is hit by a sharp blade, it will be pierced and the blood gushes out. Yet I fell into a stupor when I saw Alcibiades' blood trickling down his clothes. Of course I should have expected it; but it gave me such a great shock as if an inconceivable thing had occurred.

What really struck me as unusual was not that the wound should bleed but that it had been inflicted by me, and that a young girl of my age (I was about to say "a young man") had struck down a vigorous captain, well-trained in arms as was Alcibiades—and all this for the crime of seduction and refusal to marry a very wealthy and a very beautiful young woman!

I was really placed in a cruel embarrassment, with the fainting sister, and the brother whom I believed dead and myself who was more dead than alive. I hung to the cord of the bell, and I rung loudly enough to awaken the dead until the rope gave way. Leaving to unconscious Rosette and to disembowelled Alcibiades the task of explaining things to the domestics and to the old aunt, I ran off straight to the stable. The cool air quickly refreshed me and restored me to my normal senses. I took out my horse, saddled and bridled him myself. I harnessed him completely with elaborate care, attention and calmness so unusual at such a tense moment following a deadly duel.

I mounted my horse, and rode across the park by a path I knew: the branches of the trees all laden with dew, whipped me and wetted my face. It seemed as if the old trees extended their arms to retain me and keep me for the love of their chatelaine. If I had a superstitious turn of mind, I might



have regarded them as so many phantoms ready to seize me, threatening me with their upraised fists.

But really at that time my head was totally devoid of any idea. And I was gripped by a heavy leaden stupor so strongly that I was hardly conscious of its weight on my brain like a very tight helmet. Only it seemed to me that I had committed murder and that was the reason of my sudden departure. I was horribly in need of sleep because the violent emotions of that dreadful night had produced a strong, physical reaction and had tired me out completely.

I reached a small gate in the outer wall, which opened on the fields through a secret route which Rosette had shown me during one of our walks.

I dismounted from my horse, I touched the button and pushed the doors. I regained the saddle after conducting my horse through, and made him gallop so fast that I reached the high road to P— at early daybreak.

This is the very faithful and detailed history of my good fortune and of my first duel.

## XV

It was five o'clock in the morning when I entered the town. People were peeping out of the windows. The worthy natives exposed behind the glass-panes their benign faces adorned with pyramidal night-caps, as the steps of my horse rang loudly on the cobblestone. The local Venuses exhibited their ruddy faces and disarrayed breasts while they were earnestly discussing on the unusual appearance of a traveller at such an early hour and in such attire, for I was very scantily dressed in a suspicious garb. A small urchin with a spaniel-like face and hair grown almost on his forehead, pointed out an inn to me. He raised his ugly face to look at me more atten-

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tively. I gave him a few sous for his trouble, and a conscientious stroke with my horse-whip which made him fly away yapping like a pup. I threw myself on a bed; at once fell into a sound sleep. When I woke up it was three o'clock in the afternoon, and yet I did not feel completely rested. It was not enough after a sleepless night, an adventure, a duel and a very fast and successful flight.

I was worried very much over Alcibiades' wound. But a few days later I was fully reassured, for I learnt that nothing dangerous ensued and that he was convalescent. This relieved me of a heavy weight, as the idea of having killed a man even in self-defence and against my will, tormented me in a peculiar manner. I had not yet arrived at that state of sublime indifference to human life that I have since reached.

I returned to C—. I met again many of the young men with whom I had previously travelled. I became more intimate with them and they introduced me into several agreeable houses. I was quite at home in my manly clothes; I was used to the rough and active life I had led. The strenuous physical exercises in which I had taken part rendered me twice as robust as I was before. I accompanied those brainless lads everywhere. I rode, I hunted and I joined in their orgies. Though I have not attained to the Teutonic capacity of some of these fellows, I could empty two or three bottles without becoming tipsy—quite a remarkable progress. I could compose exquisite verses, and I deliberately kissed the waitresses of the inn. In short I became an accomplished young cavalier according to the approved style of the day. I got rid of certain provincial ideas I had about virtue and other allied subjects. On the other hand I acquired such a punctilious delicacy on the points of honour that I fought a duel almost daily; this has indeed become for me a necessity, a sort of indispensable exercise, without which I would not have felt well at all. Therefore when no one had stared at

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me or trodden on my foot, and I had no ostensible grounds for quarrel, I would serve as seconds to my comrades or even to strangers rather than remain idle.

I soon acquired a colossal reputation for bravery, and nothing less than that was necessary to stop the pleasantries which would have been invariably provoked by my beardless face and effeminate looks. But after three or four extra button-holes that I opened in some doublets and a few slices carved very delicately from some refractory skins, all generally felt more disposed to regard me more manly than Mars or Priapus, and you could have met some people who swore that they had held my bastards on the baptismal font. Apart from this apparent dissipation and wanton waste of time, I did not lose sight of my original idea, that is to say, a conscientious study of man and the solution of the important problem of a perfect lover, a problem no less difficult to solve than that, of the philosopher's stone.

Certain aims in life have this trait in common with the horizon that although they may be well in sight you can never reach them. Whatever side you may turn, you watch them flying away before you, and whether you march at crawling pace or at a wild gallop, they always remain at the same distance from you, as they manifest themselves as you advance forward, and re-form themselves farther off, ever retaining their fleeting and unapproachable features, and it is of no avail to try to catch them by the border of their flying mantles. The more I advance in my knowledge of the animal, the more I could perceive how impossible is the realization of my desire, and how far what I wanted to find in a man to love, was beyond the condition of his nature.

I was convinced that the man who would be most sincerely in love with me, would with the very best intentions, make me the most miserable of women, even though I had already shed most of the girlish idiosyncrasies I had cherished

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not so many weeks ago. I had already climbed down from the sublime clouds, not exactly down to the street or the gutter, but upon a hill of medium height, accessible, but a little steep.

The way up the hill was, it is true, rather rough. But I had the proper conceit to believe that I was well worth that exertion and that I would be esteemed as a sufficient compensation, for the trouble. I could never consent to take one step downwards to meet my prospective lover. I would wait patiently, perched on my summit.

This is the scheme I planned : under my masculine garb I should make an acquaintance with a young man of pleasing appearance, I should live with him familiarly for some time. My shrewd questions and false confidences for extracting genuine ones, would soon have given me a complete insight into his real sentiments and thought ; and if I found him such as I wished, I would leave him under pretence of an urgent necessity for a journey, and keep away from him for three or four months to allow him time to forget my features. Then I should return in my woman's clothes and arrange in a retired place a pretty little love-nest hidden amidst trees and flowers. I would meet him, and he would soon begin to court me ; I would see to that. And if he showed a true and faithful love for me, I would give myself up to him entirely without any reservation or inhibition. The title of his mistress would appear to me honourable enough, and I would not demand any other.

But assuredly this plan will never materialize as generally all plans fail, and it only proves the frailty of will and the abject impotence of man. The proverb : "What woman wills, God wills" is no more true than any other—that is to say, it has no truth in it.

As long as I only saw men from a distance and beyond my desire, they appeared handsome to me, but this was only

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an optical illusion. Now, at last I have found them frightful in the extreme, and I can no longer understand how a woman could admit such a horror into her bed. I know I could never do it; my heart revolts against it.

How gross are their features, how ignoble, base and devoid of elegance and refinement! What a lack of gracefulness! How unpleasant and distressingly ugly lines! How hard, dark and furrowed skins! Some of them have the swarthy complexion of the corpses that have been hung up for six months; they are emaciated, bony, hairy, with violin strings on their hands; with large feet, dirty moustache always stained with grub, and tucked up to their ears like hooks; rough and coarse hair like bristles of a broomstick, chin like boar's jowls, dry and cracked lips burnt by strong liquors, eyes surrounded by four or five black rings; and necks full of thick and twisted veins, heavy muscles and projecting cartilages. Others are just mattresses of red meat, pushing before them round bellies painfully encircled by their belts. They open and wink their small sea-green eyes inflamed by dissipation, and they look more like hippopotamuses in trousers than human creatures. They always smell of alcohol or tobacco or their own natural odour, which is the worst of all. As to those whose forms are a little less disgusting, they resemble ill-shaped women—that is all.

I had not noticed all that. I was living in a cloudland, my feet hardly touching the earth. The fragrance of roses and lilies in the spring was intoxicating me like a very heavy and strong perfume. I only dreamt of victorious heroes, faithful and respectful lovers, flames worthy of the altar, marvellous devotions and sacrifices, and I thought I would find it all in the first scoundrel that greeted me. However, that first flush of unsophisticated enthusiasm did not last

long. Strange suspicions entered my mind, and I had no rest until I cleared them away.

At first my horror of man was pushed to the last degree of exaggeration, and I regarded them as horrible monsters; their manners, their ways of thinking, their careless and cynical expressions, their brutalities and their contempt for women shocked and revolted me to the utmost; so little did my former ideas conform to the reality. They are not monsters if you will; but very much worse still, my faith! There are some excellent boys who are kind and jovial, who eat and drink well, who will help you in all possible ways, who are brave and spirited, good painters and musicians, who are useful and efficient for a thousand and one things except, however, for the one for which they were created, that is, mating with the animal called woman with whom they have nothing in common physically or morally.

I could, at first, hardly disguise the contempt which they provoked in me; but gradually I got used to their ways. I felt no more piqued at their railleries against women than if I had been of their sex. On the contrary I myself made some very witty jokes, and their success flattered my pride. Really none of my comrades could go so far as I did in their sarcasms and pleasantries on women. My perfect knowledge of that subject was a great advantage to me, and hence my brilliant epigrams were distinguished by the merit of an exactitude which theirs often lacked. Most of the evil of which women are generally accused is not without some foundation; but it is nonetheless difficult for men to preserve proper coolness and balance when they rail against women. There is often an admixture of love in their invectives.

I have noted that those who are most tender and who understand women best usually treat them worse than the others; and they most eagerly return to this subject with a peculiar animosity, as if they feel bitterly disappointed at

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women's shortcomings which tend to falsify the good opinion they at first formed.

What I demanded above all was not physical beauty, but a beauty of the soul, a pure and genuine love. But the love as I feel is perhaps beyond human possibilities—and yet it seems to me that I must love so, and I give more than I demand.

What a magnificent folly ! What sublime prodigality ! To deliver yourself entirely without denying anything, renouncing your ownership and free will to another, to see only through his eyes, to hear only through his ears, to make the two bodies united into one, to melt and mingle the two souls in such a fashion that you would not know, if you were your own self or the other, to be now the sun, then the moon to see all the world and all the creation transfigured into one being, to displace the centre of life, to prepare yourself at any time for the greatest sacrifices and the most absolute self-abnegation, to feel the sufferings of the beloved one as if they were your own ! That is love as I conceive it. Faithful as the ivy, entwined like the vines, cooing like doves,—these are all indispensable ; they are but primary and most simple conditions.

If I had remained at home, wearing my own dress, sadly turning my spinning wheel or doing needle work by a window, perhaps what I sought would have come to me of its own accord. Love is like fortune, and dislikes to be pursued. It has a preference for those who sleep close to the walls, and often the kisses of queens and of gods descend upon closed eyes. The thought that happiness and pleasant adventures lurk only in places where you are not present, is only a delusion and a snare ; and it is a sad mistake to saddle your horse and post off in quest of your ideal. Many people have erred in this manner, and many others will. The horizon may be always of most charming blue, but when you reach

the hills, they prove to be nothing but heaps of sterile clay or rain-soaked ochre.

I imagined that the world was full of adorable young men and that on the roads one met battalions of Amadis and Lancelots of the Lake pursuing their Dulcineas, and I was shocked to find that men had not the least inclination for that sublime quest and were ever ready to share the bed with the first harlot that came on the way. I have been duly punished for my curiosity and diffidence. I have tired myself out horribly without having attained any enjoyment.

With me knowledge has preceded the experience. Nothing is much worse than such hasty experiences which are not the fruits of action. Crassest ignorance would be much preferable ; it would at best commit you to many foolish things which would only serve to instruct you and to rectify your ideas ; for under that disgust of which I mentioned a little while ago there is always a lively and rebellious element which produces the most strange disorders ; the mind is convinced, the body is not, and refuses to subscribe to this superb disdain. The young and sturdy body claims its due, and acts under the spirit like a vigorous stallion ridden by a feeble old man whom, however, he cannot throw off, as the bridle holds its head and the bit tears the tongue.

Since I have lived with men, I have seen so many women unworthily betrayed, so many secret liaisons imprudently divulged, the most pure love dragged unceremoniously into the mire, young men rushing to frightful courtesans leaving the arms of the most lovely mistresses and the most thoroughly established intrigues suddenly broken off without any plausible motive—that I can no longer think of accepting a lover. It would be throwing myself with all my eyes open into a bottomless abyss. However, I secretly wish in my heart of hearts to have one. The voice of nature stifles the voice of reason. I feel strongly that I shall never be happy.



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unless I love and am loved. But the pity of-it is that a woman can only have a man for a lover, and men, though they may not be real demons, are certainly no angels. Even if they did attach to their shoulder-blades plumed wings and wear on their heads golden paper-crowns, I know them too well to be deceived.

All the finest things they might say to me would be of no avail. I know beforehand what they will profess and could do it very well myself on their behalf. I have seen them studying their parts and rehearsing them before stepping on the stage. I know their most effective tirades by heart and the purple passages on which they set so much value. Neither the pallor of their face or any alteration in their features would convince me ; I know that they prove nothing. A night of orgy, a few bottles of wine, and two or three girls are sufficient to alter the face very conveniently. I have seen this fine trick practised by a young marquis who, naturally, very rosy and fresh-complexioned, obtained complete success by affecting the attractive paleness acquired in the like manner. I know also how the most desperately love-sick Celadons console themselves for the rigours of their Astreas, and find means for being patient while awaiting the happy hour. I have seen the hags serving as doubles for chaste Aridanes.

In truth, after all this, no man tempts me much, for he is not endowed like woman with beauty, that splendid cloak which hides so well the failings of the soul, that divine drapery cast by God over the nudity of the world, which makes it in some way excusable to love the vilest harlot of the gutter, if she possesses this magnificent gift.

As a substitute for moral qualities, I would at least have the exquisite perfection of form, satin-like flesh, roundness of contours, softness of line, fineness of skin, all the components of feminine charm. Since I cannot have love, I

would have voluptuousness, replacing, as a makeshift, the brother by the sister. But all the men I have met appear to me awfully ugly ; my horse is infinitely more handsome, and I would kiss him with less repugnance than many of these men who think themselves very charming. Certainly a coxcomb like those I know would not be a very brilliant theme to embroider with variants of pleasure. A swordsman would not suit me either ; soldiers have something mechanical in their gait, and bestial in their faces which makes me reluctant to consider them as human beings. The gentlemen of the robe do not please me any better ; they are dirty, oily, hairy, threadbare with glassy eyes and lipless mouths. They smell of mildew and I would never brush my face against their lynx-like muzzles. As for the poets, they think of nothing in the world but the endings of words and cannot go further back than to the penultimate syllables. Moreover, it would be correct to say that they cannot be put to any profitable use. They are more tiresome than the others ; they are also ugly and they have not the least distinction nor the least elegance in their figure and deportment, and their attire is singularly odd. Some men who are occupied all day long with form and beauty fail to perceive that their bootlaces are loose and their hats ridiculous. They look like provincial apothecaries or trainers of wild dogs ; they would make you loathe poetry and verses for all eternity.

As for painters, they are also enormously stupid ; they cannot see anything beyond their seven colours. One of them in whose company I spent a few days, who was asked what he thought of me, replied : " He is of a rather warm tint, and in the shadows it would be necessary to use, instead of white, some pure Naples yellow mixed with a little Cassel ochre and reddish brown." That was his opinion of me, and besides that, he had a crooked nose and eyes to match, so they did not improve his appearance ; whom shall

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I take? A military man with a bulging chest, a lawyer with convex shoulders, a poet or a painter with a scared look or a penniless little coxcomb? Which cafe shall I choose in this menagerie? I ignore them completely, I do not prefer the one nor the other; they are all uniformly ugly and stupid.

After this, there remains still one thing for me to do; that would be to take anyone I loved, whether a porter or a jockey. But I do not love even a porter. O unhappy heroine that I am! Unmated dove condemned to elegiac cooings for all times.

Oh! how many times have I wished I were a real man instead of a spurious one! How many women there are who would have been congenial to me, whose hearts would have understood mine! How perfectly happy I should have been with those refined delicacies of love, those noble outbursts of pure passion to which I could have responded! What a softness, what a delight! How all the sensitiveness of my soul would have freely blossomed! What charming efflorescence of invisible flowers which will never open out and the mysterious perfume of which would have sweetly embalmed the sisterly soul! It seems to me that would have been an enchanting life, an infinite ecstasy with wings unfolded, promenades with hands entwined in the avenues of golden sand, through groves of eternally smiling roses, in parks full of ponds with gliding swans and alabaster vases hanging amid the leaves. Had I been a young man, how much should I have loved Rosette! What an adoration that would have been! Our souls were really made for each other, two pearls destined to melt into one! How perfectly I would have realized the idea that she had conceived of love! No other character would have suited me better than hers, and her style of beauty gave me infinite pleasure.

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It is a great pity that our love was condemned to sterile platonism.

Lately I had an adventure. I used to frequent a house where there was a very charming little girl about fifteen years old. Never had I seen a more lovely miniature. She was fair, but so delicately and transparently fair that ordinary blondes would have looked brown or dark in her presence. One would have thought that silver powder had been sprayed over her golden hair. Her eyebrows were of a tint so soft and melting that they were scarcely visible. Her eyes, of a pale blue, gave velvety glances, and her eyelashes were of pure silk. Her mouth which was so small that you could not have put your finger into it, made her look still exquisitely younger, and the soft, round, dimples in her cheeks had a charm of inexpressible ingeniousness. All her little person enchanted me beyond all expression. I loved her small white hands, her bird-like feet which barely touched the ground, her waist that a breath would have bent down, and her pearly shoulders, yet undeveloped, which her scarf, worn crosswise, happily betrayed. Her babble in which naivete added piquancy to her native wit, could engage me for hours at a time. I was singularly pleased to make her talk. She would utter a thousand delicious drolleries with an extraordinary fineness of intention, even without having the least knowledge of their meaning, thus rendering them much more attractive.

I gave her sweets and chocolates which I kept specially for her in a light shell-box, and she liked them very much. As soon as I arrived, she would run to me and feel my pockets to make sure that the chocolate case was there. I would pass it from one of my hands to the other, and a little battle would start—which always ended in her favour, and she completely ransacked me.

One day, however, she was content with bowing to me gravely, and did not show her usual interest in my sweets.

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She remained proudly sitting in her chair, quite upright with her elbows drawn back.

"Ah well, Ninon," I said, "do you now prefer salt to sugar? Or do you fear that the sweets will spoil your teeth?" With these words, I tapped the box which gave out a very sweet and sugary sound. She put out her tongue half-way on the edge of her mouth, as if to taste the idealized sweetness of the absent sweets—but she did not move.

Then I took it out of my pocket, and opened it and began to eat the almonds which she loved most. Then her instinct had for one instant got the upper hand over her resolution; she put out a hand to take some, but drew it back at once, saying: "I am too big to eat sweets," and she gave a sigh. "I have not noticed that you have grown much since last week. But perhaps you are like the mushrooms, then, which grow up in a night. Come, let me measure you."

"Laugh as much as you will," she replied with a charming pout. "I am no longer a little girl, and I want to grow taller."

"This is an excellent resolution in which you must persevere. May I know, my dear lady, how these magnificent ideas have entered your head? Only a week ago you found it very nice to be small, and cracked your almonds without worrying about your dignity."

The little girl regarded me with a strange glance, moved her eyes around her, and when she was well assured that no one could hear us, she leant towards me in a mysterious manner and said: "I have a lover."

"The deuce! I no longer wonder at your refusal of my sweets. But you were wrong in not taking some; you could have played at dinner with him or exchanged them for a shuttle-cock."

The child shrugged her shoulders disdainfully and looked at me with an air of pity. As she persisted in her attitude of

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an offended queen, I went on : "What is the name of that glorious personage ? Arthur, I suppose, or Henry ?" These were two little boys who were her playmates and she used to call them her husbands.

"No, neither Arthur nor Henry," she said, fixing her transparent eyes on my face. "A gentleman." She held her hand above her head to give me an idea of his height.

"So tall as that ? But it is getting serious. Who then is this tall lover ?"

"Monsieur Theodore, I do not mind telling you. But you must not mention it to anybody, not even to my mother or to Polly (her governess) or to your friends who, taking me for a child, would make fun of me."

I promised her the utmost secrecy, curious as I was to know who this gallant was. The child, seeing that I treated the thing as a joke, hesitated to give me her entire confidence. Reassured by my word of honour, she left her armchair, came and leaned over my shoulder and whispered very softly in my ear the name of her prince charming. I remained confounded. It was the Chevalier G—, a dirty, incorrigible rake with the morals of a schoolmaster and the physique of a drum-major, one of the most notorious debauchees it was possible to meet, a real satyr without the goat's feet and the pointed ears. That filled me with serious apprehensions for dear Ninon, and I promised myself to set matters right.

The arrival of some people put an end to our conversation. I retired into a corner and thought over some plan to stop this mischief, as it would have been worse than murder to let the little child fall into the hands of such an arrant scoundrel.

The young girl's mother was a gay woman of the world, fond of gambling, and she entertained all sorts of wits at her salon. People used to recite bad verses there and lost good crowns, which was a fair compensation. She had very little

love for her daughter whom she looked upon as a living certificate of baptism which prevented her from falsifying her chronology. Besides the girl was growing up fast, and her youthful charms gave rise to comparisons which were not advantageous to her prototype who was already showing signs of wear and tear through the friction of years. The child was therefore badly neglected and left without protection against the assaults of the scoundrels who frequented the house. If her mother had taken any interest in her, that would probably have been with the object of taking advantage of her youth and of turning her beauty into a paying proposition. One way or the other there was no doubt as to the fate awaiting her. That gave me pain, for she was a charming little creature, a beautiful pearl, who deserved a better fate than to be lost in this stinking slough. I felt it so deeply that I resolved to tear her away at all costs.

The first thing to do was to put a stop to the chevalier's activities. The way I found the simplest and most effective was to seek a quarrel with him and to make him fight me. And I had the greatest difficulty in compelling him to do it, as he is a notorious coward and fears an encounter more than anything else in the world. At last I subjected him to such pungent sneers and gibes that he had to call me out, although much against his wish. I threatened also to have him thrashed by my footman, if he did not do it with better grace. He knew well enough how to handle a sword, but fear upset him so much that our steels had hardly crossed before I managed to administer to him a pretty little thrust that sent him to bed for a fortnight. That satisfied me, as I did not want to kill him, I preferred to let him live to get himself hanged elsewhere in due course, a touching sentiment of mine for which he ought to feel grateful. My wretch being now safely consigned to his bed, properly bandaged, it

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only remained to induce the child to leave the house, and this was not very difficult.

I served her a story made up by me to explain in my own way the disappearance of her lover about whom she was seriously worried. I told her that he had gone off with an actress; that made her indignant, as you can well imagine. But to console her, I told her all I knew against her chevalier, who was an ugly, old drunkard, and in the end I asked her if she would not sooner have me for her gallant. She readily gave her consent because, as she remarked, I was better looking and my clothes were new. Such naivete, expressed with grave seriousness, made me laugh almost to tears. Then I coaxed her, and succeeded so well that she agreed to leave the house. A few bouquets, as many kisses and a pearl necklace that I presented to her charmed her immensely and she assumed in the presence of her young friends a most amusing air of importance.

I ordered for her a very rich and very elegant outfit of a page, as I could not take her with me in girl's clothes as long as I did not resume my old dress; but that I would not do. I bought her a little horse, quiet and easy to ride, and yet sufficiently fast to follow my mount when I wanted to gallop. Then I instructed the belle to come down at nightfall to her door where I would meet her. This she did very punctually. I found her watching for me behind the half-open door. I rode quite close to the house; she came out. I gave her my hand, she rested her foot on the point of mine, and jumped very lightly up behind me with a remarkable agility. I spurred my horse, and by making a detour through half-a-dozen deserted lanes, I returned to my house without anyone seeing me.

I made her put off her clothes to wear her disguise, and helped her into it. At first she raised some objections as she wanted to dress herself alone. But I explained to her that it



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would take too long a time, and besides, she being my mistress, it was not improper in the least and that it was rather an usual practice between lovers. Nothing was more needed to convince her, and she gave in with the best grace in the world.

Her body was a marvel of delicacy ; her arms, though a little thin like those of all young maidens, were nevertheless wonderfully well-shaped, and her budding bosom gave such a charming promise that, when fully formed, it would be really incomparable. She had still all the graces of the child with all the charms of womanhood. She was in that adorable stage of transition from childhood to maturity, that fugitive and delicious interval in life when beauty is full of promise, and when each day, instead of snatching away something from your love, adds to it new perfections.

Her costume suited her well. It gave her a slightly militant look which was very curious and amusing, she broke into a loud laughter, when I presented to her a mirror to watch the effects of her toilette. I persuaded her to eat some biscuits dipped in Spanish wine in order to hearten her and sustain her to bear the rigour of our long journey.

The horses were ready, saddled for us in the yard. She mounted hers with some deliberation, and I mounted mine ; we started off. The night was dark, and the lights were being extinguished every moment to show that the honest town of C—was behaving virtually as all provincial towns should at nine in the evening.

We could not proceed very fast, as Ninon was an indifferent rider ; when her horse trotted she clung to its mane with all her might. However, on the following morning we were far away enough to feel safe. But we were not pursued, or if we were at all, our pursuers must have taken the wrong direction.

I became very deeply attached to the young little girl. As

you were no longer near me, my dear Graciosa, I always felt acutely the need of caressing lovingly something, a child or a dog. Ninon afforded me that pleasure. She slept in the same bed with her little arms around me. She seriously believed that she was my mistress and never doubted that I was a man. Her youth and extreme innocence helped to persist in this error which I was careful not to correct. The kisses I gave her completed her illusion as her mind was not yet inquiring further, and her desires were not yet more voluptuous to lead her to suspect anything else.

Besides, she was only partly deceived. Really there was as much difference between her and myself as there is between other men and myself. She was so light, so slender, so diaphanous, of such peculiarly delicate a nature that she was a woman even to me who am myself a woman ; and I looked like a Hercules beside her. I am tall and dark, she is short and fair ; her features are so soft that they make mine appear hard and austere, and her voice is such a melodious warble that when conversing with her mine sounds harsh. A man could break her up with his hands, and I always fear that the wind might carry her away. I would love to have her encased in a locket and to suspend it from my neck. You cannot imagine, my good friend, how much of grace and wit she possesses, how sweet is her speech and how delightful are her manners and caresses. She is the most adorable creature on earth, and it would have been a disgrace to have left her with her unworthy mother.

It gave me a peculiar pleasure to hide this treasure from the rapacity of men. I was the griffin preventing them from approaching her. If I did not enjoy her myself, at least no one else did—an idea always comforting to me, whatever the wiseacres may say in condemning egoism. I intended to preserve her innocence as long as possible, and to keep her

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near me until she would refuse to stay any longer or until I assured a safe future for her.

In her boyish disguise, I took her in all my travels. She enjoyed this style of life, and her zest helped her to stand the rigours of travelling. Everywhere I was congratulated on the exquisite beauty of my page, and I have no doubt that it roused in the minds of many a suspicion exactly the opposite of the truth. Many people attempted to unravel the mystery, but I never allowed her to speak to anybody, and the inquisitive busybodies were all disappointed.

Every day I discovered in that amiable creature some new quality which urged me to cherish her still more and to congratulate myself on my decision. Assuredly men were not worthy of possessing her, and it would have been deplorable if such charms of her body and soul had been sacrificed to their brutish appetites and to their cynical depravity.

A woman alone could love her delicately and tenderly. One aspect of my character which could never have been developed in any other connexion was brought to light in this adventure, that was the desire and inclination to afford protection—a virtue which is usually found in men. If I had a lover, it would have displeased me, if he had assumed protective airs towards me, for the simple reason that I myself would prefer to take up that role with regard to those whom I love; it flatters my vanity to be protective, however agreeable may be the passive role of being protected. I felt so much pleasure in attending to my little fair friend, helping her on difficult roads, holding her bridle or stirrup, serving her at table, undressing her and putting her to bed, defending her if insulted—practically doing for her all that the most passionate and faithful lover would do for his adored mistress.

By imperceptible degrees I was losing the consciousness of my sex; though at the beginning, I had to force myself to behave like a man. Now this never happened. Only when

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I write to you, who know my secret, I introduce an unnecessary virility in my adjectives. If ever I have a fancy to fetch my skirts from the drawers in which I left them—which I doubt I will ever do unless I fall in love with a young beau—I will have much difficulty in giving up my present disguise ; instead of looking like a woman dressed as a man, I shall have the appearance of a man in the guise of a woman. In truth neither of the two sexes in mine. I am not stupidly submissive, nor timid like women, nor do I possess their meanness. On the other hand, I have none of men's vices, their disgusting intemperance nor their beastly propensities. I belong to a third sex which has not been discovered yet, whether it is higher or lower than the existing ones. I have the body and soul of a woman, the spirit and strength of a man, and I have too much or too little of each to couple with either of them.

O Graciosa, I shall never be able to love anyone completely, man or woman. Something which is never satiated is always gnawing within me, and a lover or a friend would only satisfy only one side of my nature. If I had a lover, the feminine elements in me would doubtless dominate the masculine ; but this would not last long, and I know I would only be partly satisfied. If I had a woman friend, the incapacity for physical voluptuousness would become an obsession which would hinder me from tasting the purest passions of the soul—with the result that I do not know which to choose and continually I waver from one to the other.

My ideal would be to have both sexes in turn for satisfying this double nature ; man to-day, woman to-morrow. I would reserve for my lover my languorous tenderness, my devoted and submissive manners, my softest caresses, my little plaintive sighs, all that which is cattish and womanly in my character. Then with my mistresses I would be bold, passionate, aggressive, with my hat triumphantly cocked over

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my ear in the style of a blustering adventurer. My true nature would thus be brought to full light, and I would be perfectly happy, as real happiness consists in the ability to expand freely in all directions and in realizing all the inherent potentialities of one's personality. But as all this is impossible, it is useless to dream about it.

I have kidnapped the child with the intention of introducing a change in my emotional life, and of directing on some one all the vague tenderness that floats in my soul and floods it. I took her as a receptacle for all my sentiments of love. But soon I discovered, in spite of all my passionate love for her, that an immense void and a bottomless abyss still remained in my heart, and her most affectionate caresses failed to satisfy me. I decided on trying a lover, but a long time elapsed without my meeting a man whom I did not dislike.

I forgot to tell you that Rosette, having discovered my whereabouts, had written to me a most entreating letter, begging me that I should go and see her once again. As I could not refuse, I went over to her country-residence where she was living. I have visited her several times, and only very recently, too. Rosette, despairing of ever having me for a lover, has thrown herself headlong into the whirlpool of society and dissipation, as do all tender souls who are not religious-minded, when they are disappointed in their first love. She had many adventures in a short time and the list of her conquests was already pretty long, as there were many persons who had no such reason to resist her as I had.

There was with her a young man named d'Albert who was then her declared lover. It seems that I made a particular impression upon him and from the first he took a strong liking to me. Although he treated Rosette with proper esteem and his manners towards her were tender enough, he did not really love Rosette, not out of satiety or disgust, but

just because she did not come up to certain standards, true or false, which he had formed of love and beauty. An idealized phantom interposed between them, and hindered him from being as happy as he would have been otherwise. Evidently she was not the lady of his dream, and he sighed for another. But he was not actively seeking for it and remained faithful to the bonds that were weighing on him, for he has in his soul more delicacy and honour than most men have, and his heart is far from being as corrupt as his mind. Not knowing that Rosette had never loved anybody except me and that she was still in love with me, he was afraid to wound her feelings by letting her see that he did not love her. Out of such considerations he sacrificed himself in a most generous way.

The beauty of my features captivated him, as he attaches an extraordinary importance to physical appearance; so much so that he fell in love with me in spite of manly disguise. I confess that I admired him for the fineness of his instinct and I esteemed him for penetrating through my deceptive dress. At the outset he was accusing himself of entertaining a depraved and perverse love, and I was inwardly enjoying myself to see him in such torments. Sometimes in meeting me he had a scared look which amused me very much; and his natural inclination which attracted him to me appeared to him as a diabolical impulse to be resisted. On those occasions he would fall back upon Rosette with fury and tried his best to conform to the more orthodox practices of love-making, but still he could not but return to me more inflamed with passion than before. Then the luminous idea that I might turn out to be a woman dawned on his mind. To convince himself of this he began to observe and study me with the most minute attention. He must know exactly every bit of my hair and he must count every bristle in my eyebrows and eyelashes. My feet,

hands, neck, cheeks even the faintest down at the corner of lips—he critically examined, compared and analyzed them all; and from that scrutiny in which the artist aided the lover, it seemed clear as daylight that I was duly and truly a woman, and besides, ideal beauty of his type, the reality of his dream. A marvellous discovery!

It now only remained to coax me to pity, and to obtain the gift of my loving mercy, to get the authentic proof of my sex. A comedy that we played and in which I acted the role of a woman, settled the matter for him. I gave him a few equivocal glances and made use of some passages in my part, analogous to our situation, to embolden him and to goad him to declare himself. Although I had no passion for him, I found him pleasant enough to save him from dying of a broken heart. As he was the first to have suspected my real sex since my transformation, I deemed it proper to enlighten him on this important point, and I was determined not to leave him in any shadow of a doubt. Several times he came to my room with his declaration on his lips, but his courage failed him; for really it must be extremely difficult to profess love to some one who is dressed like yourself and who puts on riding-boots. Finally, unable to speak out, he wrote to me a very long, very grandiloquent letter, in which he took great pains in explaining what I understood better than he did.

I do not know what to do; whether to accept or reject his request. The latter course would be extravagantly virtuous, and besides a refusal would be too painful to him! If we afflict those who love us, what shall we do to those who hate us. Perhaps it would be more becoming to be cruel for a while and wait at least a month before taking off the skin of the tigress and getting into a chemise. But since I have decided to yield to him, better now and here than later. I do not care much for those mathematically

aduated resistances that yield to-day a hand, to-morrow a foot, then the leg and the knee up to the garter, nor for those intractable virtues ever ready to ring for the servants the limit fixed for the day has been overstepped by a line. It makes me laugh to see those methodical Lucretias who will walk backwards with signs of the most virginal fright and throwing from time to time a furtive glance over their shoulders to assure themselves of the easy and convenient position of the sofa on which they intend to collapse. Such a precautionary measure I could never take.

I do not love d'Albert, at least in the sense I give to this word. But certainly I do like him, and I have a certain leaning towards him. His wit pleases me and his person does not repel me. And there are very few men of whom I can say as much. He has not all what I want, but he has more than I like in him is that he does not seek to satiate himself brutally as other men do. He has a perpetual aspiration, and he constantly aspires for the beautiful, the materially beautiful it is true, but it is still a noble inclination which suffices to keep him in the pure and idealistic regions. His conduct with Rosette proves the honesty of his heart, honesty more rare than the other if it is possible.

And then, if I must confess it, I am possessed with the most violent desires. I languish and I die of voluptuousness, the dress I wear, while inducing me to all sorts of adventures with women, protects me too well against the enterprises of men. An idea of pleasure which I never realize haunts vaguely in my mind, and that insipid and colourless dream exhausts me. So many women living in the chastest environments lead the lives of courtesans, and I, by a ludicrous contrast, remain a spotless virgin, chaste and cold as a lily herself, amidst the worst dissipation in the company of the most notorious debauchees of the century. This daily innocence when not balanced by the innocence of the



mind is the most miserable thing possible ; so that my flesh does not parade its pride before my spirit ; I must profane it equally, if it is a greater profanation than eating or drinking, which I doubt. In a word I will find out everything there is to be learnt about man. Since d'Albert has succeeded in recognizing me through my disguise, it is meet and proper that he should be rewarded for his keen power of observation. He is the first to divine that I am a woman, and I will do my best to prove to him that his suspicions are well founded. It would be really uncharitable to let him believe that he has monstrous taste.

It is therefore d'Albert who will solve my doubts and give me my first lessons in love. It only remains now to bring it about in a really poetic way. I am inclined not to reply to his letter and pretend to be cold towards him for a few days. Then when he will be very morose and despairing, inveighing against the gods, shaking his fist at creation and looking into wells to ascertain if they are not too deep to throw himself into them, then I shall cast off my donkey's skin to the farthest end of the corridor and put on my sky-blue dress, that is my costume as Rosalind, for my feminine wardrobe is very poor. Then I shall go to him, radiant like a strutting peacock with outspread tail, displaying all that which I have so long carefully concealed ; and wearing only a little circlet of lace round my bosom, very low and very loose, I shall address him in my most pathetic tone : "O, most shrewd and poetic young man ! I am truly a young and chaste beauty who adores you and who desires to share her pleasures with you. See if that suits you, and if you have still any scruples lingering in your mind, feel and touch this, set your heart at ease and sin as much as you can."

At the end of this wonderful discourse, I shall let myself fall, half-swooning into his arms ; while uttering melancholy sighs. I shall adroitly unfasten the hooks of my dress and

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appear before him in the proper costume of the hour, that is, in partial nudity. D'Albert will do the rest, and I hope that the next morning I shall be in a position to know all about those wonderful things which have so long troubled my brain. While satisfying my curiosity, I shall at the same time have the pleasure of making a man happy.

I also propose to pay Rosette a visit in the same costume and let her see that if I have not responded to her love it is not from coldness or disgust, I do not wish her to have a bad opinion of me, and she deserves as much as d'Albert that I should reveal my true sex for her benefit. What a look of surprise her face will assume at such a revelation! Her pride will be consoled, but her love will lament.

Good-bye, my kind and beautiful friend; pray God that I may not think so little of the pleasure as those that bestow it. I have been light and flippant all through this long letter. And yet what I am going to undertake is a momentous thing, which may influence the rest of all my life.

### XVI

It was now more than a fortnight since d'Albert had placed his love letter on Theodore's table. And yet no change was visible in the latter's attitude. D'Albert could not understand the reason of this silence. It seemed that Theodore had not received his letter. Had it been mislaid or lost? This seemed hardly likely as Theodore had returned to his room almost immediately after, and it would have been very surprising that he failed to see a large sheet of paper placed in the middle of the table in such a position as to attract the attention of the least observant. Or was it that Theodore was really a man and not a woman as d'Albert had imagined? Or even if "she" were a woman, had she

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towards him such an insuperable aversion, such a peculiar contempt that she would not even condescend to give him a reply ?

Poor d'Albert who had not the privilege like ourselves, of perusing the correspondence of Graciosa, the confidante of the beautiful de Maupin, was unable to answer these questions either affirmatively or negatively, and therefore he was thrown in an unsettled mental state.

One evening he was in his room, with his brow pressed against the window-pane, looking sadly at the chestnut trees, the dry leaves of which were dropping away. A thick overhanging mist obscured the view of the horizon, and the approaching night more greyish than black, softly touched the tops of trees with its velvety feet. A large swan was diving amorously its neck in the water of the stream ; its whiteness made it appear like a big star of snow. It was the only living being that animated this gloomy landscape.

D'Albert was musing as gloomily as any person dreams at five o'clock in the dusky autumnal evening, a disappointed man for whom the sharp north wind provided the only music and the skeleton of a leafless forest the only scenery. He thought of throwing himself into the river, but the water seemed very black and cold, and the example of the swan was not encouraging. He might have blown out his brains with a pistol. But he had no pistol and powder, and he would have felt sorry to have them. He might have taken another mistress or even two—a sinister thought—but he did not know any woman whom he could prefer. Deep despair pushed him to the idea of resuming his acquaintance with women whom he had found perfectly unbearable and whom he would have thrashed out of his house by his lackey. At last he decided on something worse—he would write a second letter. O wretched idiot !

He was in the midst of these meditations when he felt

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on his shoulder the pressure of a hand placed there like a little dove alighting on a palm tree. This comparison is a little defective in as much as d'Albert's shoulder was nothing like a palm tree. Still, let us keep to this pure and simple orientalism. His glance followed up from the hand to a shoulder which belonged to Theodore, Rosalind, Mademoiselle d' Aubigny, or Madelaine de Maupin, to call her by her real name.

Who was surprised? Neither you nor myself, as we were prepared for this visit. But d'Albert did not expect it in the least. He gave out a little cry of surprise, which was halfway between "Oh" and "Ah." However, I have reasons to think that it was nearer to "Ah" than to "Oh." Really it was Rosalind, so radiant and beautiful that she lit up the room with the strings of pearls in her hair, her prismatic dress, her fine lace, her red-heeled shoes and her lovely fan of peacock's plumes—in short, such as she was on the day of the performance of the play. Only this difference—which was most important and telling—she wore neither scarf, ruff nor anything to cover her neck and bosom to conceal all their loveliness.

A beautiful, bare bosom, white, opalescent like an antique marble of the purest and the most exquisite shape, boldly stood out of her low-cut dress in a most challenging manner. That was a most reassuring sight for d'Albert who accordingly let loose in full confidence his madly confused emotions.

"Well, Orlando; can you not make out your Rosalind, or have you left your love hanging with your sonnets on the thorns of a bush in the forest of Ardenness? Are you quite cured of the sickness for which you were asking me a remedy with such insistence? I am afraid you are!"

"Oh no, Rosalind, I feel worse than ever. I am in terrible agony. I am dead or very nearly so."

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"You look remarkably well for a dead man. Many living people do not seem to look so well as you do."

"What a dreadful week I have gone through, you can never imagine it, Rosalind! I hope it may be reckoned as equivalent to a thousand years of purgatory in the other world. But if I may ask you, why have you not replied to me earlier?"

"Why? I hardly know, unless it was because I did not. However, if this reason fails to convince you, here are three others, much worse, from which you may pick and choose. First, you were so much carried away by your passion that it did not occur to you to write legibly, so that it has taken me more than a week to guess what you meant. Secondly, because my modesty did not allow me less time to reconcile myself to the idea of taking a dithyrambic poet like yourself as my lover; and lastly, because I was anxious to see whether you could go so far as to blow out your brains or to take opium or to hang yourself with your garters. There you are!"

"Oh, you wicked jester! I assure you, you have done well in coming here to-day. You might not have found me tomorrow."

"Really! poor boy! do not look so gloomy and miserable, or I might get soft myself, and it would make me more stupid than all the animals in Noah's ark. If I once let loose the floodgates of my emotions, you will be submerged, I warn you. You have heard I gave you three bad reasons, I now offer you three good kisses. Do accept them on condition that the kisses will obliterate the reasons. I owe you that much and even more."

Saying so, the belle came to the doleful lover, and threw her bare arms around his neck. D'Albert kissed her effusively on both cheeks and then on her lips. The last kiss lasted much longer than the others and could have been worth

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four. Then Rosalind understood that all she had before was mere child's play. Her debt paid, and greatly moved, she sat down on d'Albert's knee, and passing her fingers through his hair said :

"All my cruelties are now exhausted, my sweet friend. It took me a fortnight to gratify my natural ferocity. But I confess I found them tedious. Do not get conceited at my frank confession ; but I am telling you the bare truth. I surrender into your hands, you are at liberty to take your revenge for my past wrongs. Had you been a stupid fellow, I would not have told you all that, but I cannot stand stupid men. I could have easily made you believe that your boldness had shocked me and that all your platonic sighs and all your concentrated essence of balderdash would never suffice to earn my pardon for an act which gladdened me. I could like other women resist you long and allow you by small instalments what I am now granting all at once and without reserve. But I do not think that would have increased by a hair's breadth your love for me. I am, not demanding of you any oath of eternal love or any profuse protestations. Love me as much as you will. I will do as much for you. I will not condemn you as a perfidious wretch when you love me no more ; and you should also spare me the corresponding epithets if I leave you. If I should happen to go away from you, I shall only just be a woman who has ceased to love you ; and nothing more. It does not follow after having loved each other, two people should hate for ever. Whatever may happen, wherever destiny may take me, I swear to you—and this is a promise that can be carried out—that I will always have a charming remembrance of you. And when I am no more your mistress, I shall still be your friend as I have been your comrade. Tonight, I have discarded my disguise in your favour. Tomorrow I shall put it on again. Remember that only at

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night I am Rosalind ; and by day I am and can on Theodore de Serannes." Whatever she wanted to add smothered by a long kiss which d'Albert planted on her followed by many others, the number of which had not recorded. As d'Albert's entreaties were becoming more to and ardent, her face, instead of getting brighter, assume expression of proud melancholy which gave her lover a uneasiness.

"Why, my queen, have you the chaste and serious of Diana of old, when it would be much better to have smiling lips of Venus rising from the sea ?"

"My dear d'Albert, it may be because I am more Diana the huntress than anything else. I have donned early age the dress of man for reasons it would be tedious and useless to tell you. You alone have divined my secret ; I have made any conquests, they have been over won ; very superficial conquests they have been and more once most embarrassing. In a word, although it is a strange and incredible fact, I am still a virgin, as virginal as the snow on the Himalayas, as the moon before she lay down on Endymion's side. I am feeling the seriousness of the change I am about to take, from which there is no turning back. It is a metamorphosis, a transformation that I am on the eve of undergoing. It will change me from a maiden into a woman ; to-morrow, I will no longer have what I have today. I am going to learn something I did not know. It is why I am sad, my friend, and not for any fault of yours."

As she spoke, she parted the young man's long hair with her fair hands, and planted her soft lips on his pale forehead. D'Albert deeply moved by the sweet and solemn tone of her speech, took her hands and kissed all the fingers in turn. Then he very delicately tore the lacing of her dress, so that the corsage opened out, the two snow-white treasures appearing in all their splendour. On that beautiful bosom

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two white roses in full bloom. Rosalind allowed him full liberty and displayed a patience almost unlimited.

"You must be thinking me very awkward and very cold, my poor d'Albert. But really I do not know what to do. You will have much to teach me and I am giving you a painful task." D'Albert replied in the proper way. Instead of speaking, he rained caresses on her. Her hair fell loose, her dress dropped down to her feet as if by magic. She stood upright in her under-garment like a white apparition. The enchanted lover knelt down and had very soon unlaced the two pretty little shoes and threw away the embroidered stockings into a corner.

Her chemise before long followed in the wake of the frock and slipped off from her shoulders without meeting any interference; then taking advantage of the fact that her arms were hanging straight down, it cleverly slipped further down until it met her hips which stopped it halfway. Rosalind noticing the tricks of the garment, raised her knee to stop its farther progress. So posed, she looked like a perfect imitation of those marble statues of goddesses whose lovely draperies regretfully remain wrapped on the beautiful thighs and by a lucky accident stop just below what it was their duty to cover. But not being made of marble, the chemise soon fell down around her feet just like a faithful hound.

There should have been a simple way to prevent all this disorder—for instance, by holding the garment up with her hand. But let us add that the lady was far too distracted to think of it. She thus remained unveiled and uncovered in all the transparent lustre of her beautiful body under the soft glow of an alabaster lamp that d'Albert had lighted.

D'Albert, dazzled, contemplated her in ecstasy.

"I feel cold," she said crossing her arms to her shoulders.

"Oh! please, another minute!"



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Rosalind removed her hands, steadied herself against the armchair and remained motionless. She did not seem ill at ease ; the natural pink of her cheek was not growing any darker. But her heart was beating so fast that it shook her breasts.

The young admirer of beauty could not look passionately enough at the spectacle, and his eyes would never have satiated of it. We must say, however, to the infinite credit of Rosalind, that reality was beyond his dream and left no room for the slightest disappointment.

In the magnificent belle posed before his eyes, all that is beautiful was harmoniously blended—elegance, strength, form and colour, the lines of the Greek statue of the glorious period, and the tone such as Titian would paint. He now beheld, palpable and crystallized, the cloudy vision that he had tried so often to halt in its flight. He was no longer compelled as he used to complain bitterly to his friend Silvio, to circumscribe his glance to certain well-shaped features, never letting it wander out of them on pain of meeting something unsightly. His amorous eyes could rove about down to her feet and upwards to her hair, always sweetly caressed by the sight of a harmonious and perfected form.

The knees were admirably pure, the ankles elegant and fine, the legs superb, the hips supple and powerful, the body glossy as agate, the breasts would make the gods climb down from heaven to kiss, the arms and shoulders magnificent. A torrent of beautiful brown hair, lightly curled, as one sees on the heads painted by old masters, fell in little waves along an ivory back and marvellously heightened its whiteness.

The painter in him being satisfied, the lover got the other hand ; for though one may be a connoisseur of art and beauty, there are certain things one cannot merely look at for any length of time with full satisfaction.

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He lifted the belle in his arms and carried her to the bed, and in an instant he was ready at her side.

Although her body was cold as snow it only served to burn d'Albert's still more. In a second she became as warm as d'Albert under his mad and ardent caresses. He wished he could have kissed her entire body all at once; but in this splendid collection of precious treasures he could only deal with them singly one at a time.

They could not keep their lips apart and Rosalind's fragrant lips were now one with d'Albert's. They were panting, their arms had no longer the strength to hold each other, and soon the inquisitive Rosalind was fully enlightened on the obscure subject which had worried her so much.

However as one lesson does not constitute a complete course of instruction, d'Albert was obliging enough to impart further knowledge. We need not quote it in detail, we leave it to the imagination of the readers.

It would most probably create an unpleasant situation between our fair readers and their lovers if we did reveal all that d'Albert did for his beloved. Let it suffice to say that if the fair reader would try to remember the experiences of her most charming night which she would never forget in all her life and to reckon on her fingers how many tokens of love she received from her lover, then she can fill the blank which we must leave in our story.

Rosalind's knowledge made an immense progress that night. Her physical innocence and the maturity of her mind formed a most adorable and sparkling contrast. D'Albert was ravishingly enraptured, and he would have liked that night to last forty-eight hours like the night on which Hercules was conceived.

However, at the dawn of day, in spite of those profuse caresses capable of keeping any one awake, d'Albert could not help taking rest, and sweet slumber overcame him.

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„Rosalind looked at him for a while with sadness and in deep reflection. Then as dawn was casting its first faint light through the window, she raised his head, laid it gently on the pillow, rose and left the bed.

She put on her dress in haste, then came back to the bed, leaned over d'Albert and kissed both his eyes. Then she receded backward, looking all the while at him from behind.

Instead of returning to her room, she went straight to Rosette's. I have never been able to know what she said or did there.

I have not found anything about it either in the papers of Graciosa or in the correspondence of Silvio and d'Albert. Only a maid of Rosette told me the following facts about this visit. Her mistress had not slept that night with her lover. But the bed was left in disorder ; it had obviously been used, and it bore the marks of two bodies. Moreover she showed me two pearls exactly resembling those that Theodore wore in his hair while acting in the role of Rosalind she had found them on the bed. As for myself, I have made a thousand and one conjectures, all quite unreasonable ; they seem to me so absurd that I do not dare to write them even in the most virtuously periphrastic style.

It was about midday when Theodore left Rosette's room. He did not appear either at dinner or supper. D'Albert and Rosette displayed no surprise at it. He went to bed early, and the next morning just at daybreak, without a word to anybody, he saddled his horse and his page's and left the chateau after telling the footman that he would not possibly return before a few days.

D'Albert and Rosette were greatly puzzled, and they could not guess the cause of her strange disappearance. D'Albert was specially worried as, after his prowess of the first night, he thought he deserved another. At the end of the week the unhappy lover received a letter from Theodore

which we transcribe below. I am afraid it will not satisfy my readers ; but in fact the letter was written thus and not otherwise, and this glorious romance will have no other conclusion.

XVII

" You are no doubt greatly surprised, my dear d'Albert, at what has transpired. And I do think that you have every right to be surprised at what I have done. You must have already heaped on me a score of those epithets that we jointly agreed to erase from our vocabulary—perfidious, villainous, faithless etc. Is it not so ? At least you would not call me cruel or virtuous, and that is a positive gain to me. You are cursing me, and there you are wrong. You have wanted me, you loved me, I was your ideal. Very well. I gave you all that you wanted, and you might have obtained it earlier. I have served as the embodiment of your dream, and I did it most gracefully. I gave you what I shall certainly never give to any one again. That was a surprise on which you hardly counted, and for which you ought to be more thankful—to me. Now that I have satisfied you, it pleases me to leave you. What is there so awful in all this ?

" You had me entirely and without reserve one whole night. What more do you expect ? Another night, and yet another ? You would even want to spend the day with me. And so you would go on until I disgusted you. I can hear you shouting very gallantly that I am not one of whom you can ever get disgusted. My God ! with me it would be the same as with the others.

" It might last six months, two years, or ten years, if you will, but there must come an end to it. You might keep me out of an ethical sentiment or because you would lack the

moral courage to turn me out. What good it is to wait for that end? And then perhaps I might cease to love you. I found you charming, but after seeing continually for long I might find you detestable. Pardon me for suggesting this possibility. In living with you in close intimacy, I would, no doubt, see you some day, in a cloth cap or in any droll and ridiculous domestic scene. Then necessarily you would lose that romantic and mysterious charm which seduced me above all things, and your character, once better understood, would no longer seem strangely attractive to me. And you would cease to fill such a large place in my mind, just in the same way we never open those books which are ready at hand in our library. You would not appear so witty or so handsome. I would detect that your coat was ill-fitting or your stockings were untidy. I would have a thousand rude shocks of this kind which would distress me painfully, and at last, I would have concluded that you had neither heart nor soul, and that I was fated to be misunderstood in love.

"You adore me and I love you. You have not the slightest reproach against me, neither have I the least complaint against me. I have been particularly faithful to you all the time our love lasted. I have not deceived you in anything. I never faked my looks or my virtue. You had the extreme generosity to profess that I was more beautiful than you had imagined. For the beauty I placed at your disposal, you have given me abundant pleasure. And so we are quits. I am going my own way and you go yours. Perhaps we may meet again at the Antipodes. Live in this hope.

"Perhaps you believe that I do not love you since I leave you. You will recognize the truth later on. Had I not really loved you, I should have remained with you, pouring out the insipid beverage to its dregs. Your love would have expired from sheer boredom. After a while you would have forgotten my existence, and reading my name over in the

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list of your conquests you might have asked : 'Who on earth is that woman?' I have now at least the satisfaction of knowing that you will remember me longer than the others. Your unsatiated desire will unfold its wings to fly towards me. I shall be always to you something desirable, and your fancy would long to return to me. I hope that in the beds of your future mistresses you would sometimes dream of the unique night you spent with me.

"Never will you be so amiable as you were then to me, and even if you were, it would really be somewhat less, because in love as in poetry to remain at the same identical point is to go back.

"Hold to that impression ; it will be well for you. You have rendered difficult the task of my future lovers, if I shall have ever any ; nobody can ever efface my recollection of you. They shall be the heirs of Alexander.

"If it pains you very much to lose me, burn this letter which is the sole proof that you have had me, and you will believe that I only existed in your dream. Who will prevent you ? The vision has vanished before daybreak at the hour when dreams return home by the ivory gate. How many men have died who, less fortunate than you, could not give even one single kiss to the object of their dreams !

"I am neither capricious nor mad nor am I a conceited prude. What I am doing is the outcome of a deep conviction. It is not with the object of inflaming your passion more nor out of calculated coquetry that I have departed from you. Do not try to follow me or to seek me again. You will never succeed. My precautions to conceal my whereabouts from you have been taken too carefully. You will ever remain to me the man who opened up to me a world of new sensations. That is certainly one of those things that a woman does not easily forget. Though absent,

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I shall often think of you, more often than if you were with me.

"Do your best to console poor Rosette who must be as much sorry over my departure as you are. You two should love each other well, and remember me whom you both loved, and sometimes mention my name in a kiss."

